# British-Indian strategy and policy in Mesopotamia : November 1914 - April 1916.

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# British-Indian Strategy and Policy in Mesopotamia November 1914-April 1916

by

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Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 5 November 1914, and two days later landed troops on Turkish soil at the head of the Persian Gulf. Indian Expeditionary Force 'D', commanded by General Sir Arthur Barrett, quickly captured the port of Basra and expanded their hold to encompass the Shatt-al-Arab as far up-river as Kurna, at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. An expedition up the Karun River into Persia secured the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's fields, and the original instructions of Force 'D' were fulfilled. Their orders had been to maintain the British interests and alliances with the Gulf sheikhs, show the Arabs that Britain meant to support them against the Turks, and consolidate the oil fields and pipeline. By April 1915, another division was added to Force 'D' and its new commander, General Sir John Nixon, arrived in Mesopotamia with orders to protect the oil supply, establish British control in the province of Basra, and prepare plans for a possible future offensive on Baghdad.

From April 1915 to April 1916, the lack of direction, policy and cooperation between Nixon, India and London resulted in the total lack of a suitable logistical framework in Mesopotamia, and only disaster could result. It is the purpose of this paper to examine how the course of Force 'D' altered from its original purpose, what the effects of that change were, and to apportion responsibility for the drift and the calamity that ensued because of it. This paper will also attempt to appraise the conclusions and effects of the Mesopotamia Commission.

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MAPS

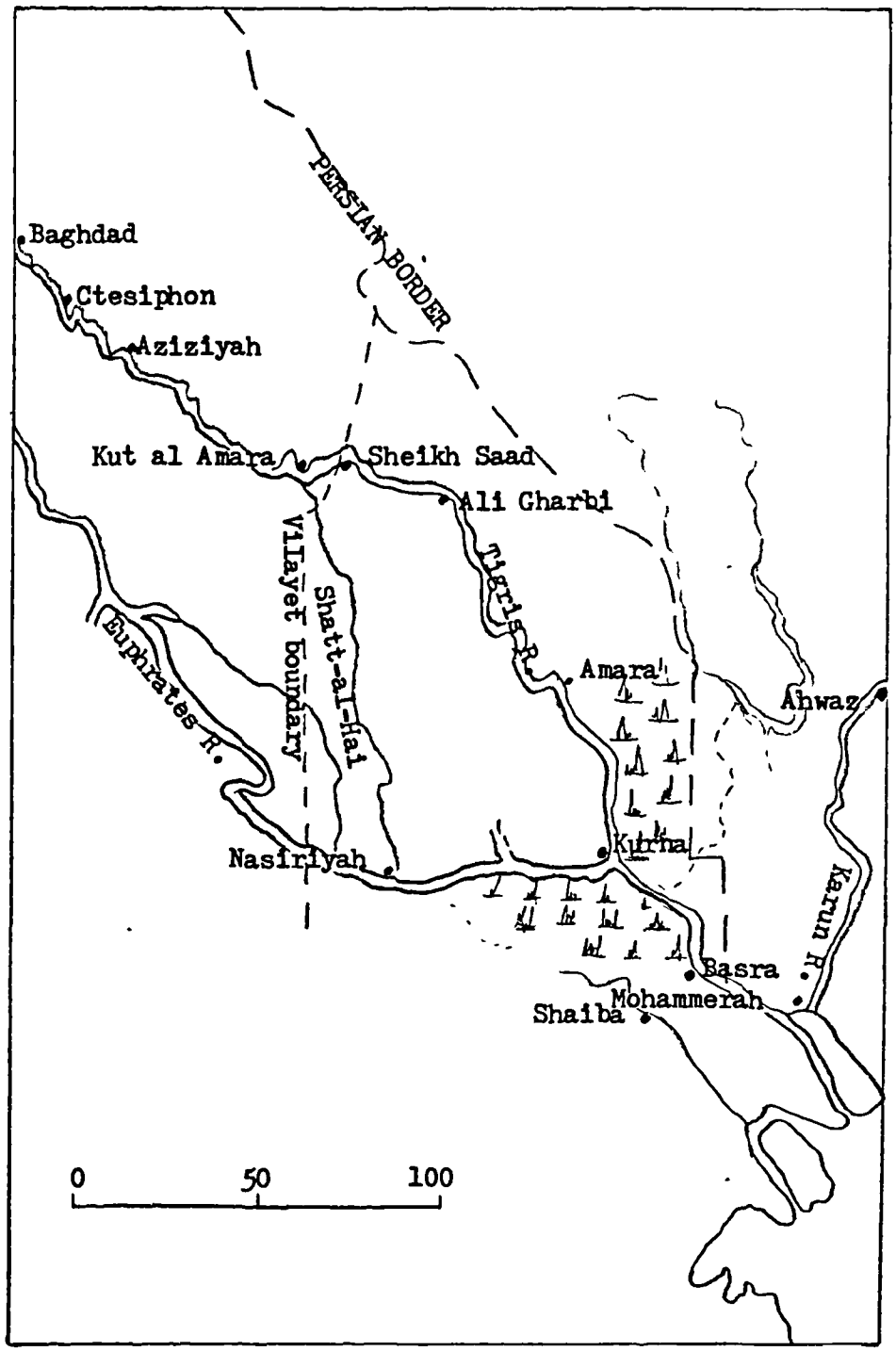


(All maps taken from The Neglected War, by A. J. Barker, except Lower Mesopotamia, from National Geographic map of the Middle East, and Arabistan, from A Brief Outline of the Operations in Mesopotamia, by Maj. R. Evans.)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the spelling of the Mesopotamian locales and Turkish personalities are subject to a variety of interpretations, I have chosen to adopt spellings that were prevalent in the documents of the time, unless a direct quotation employs a spelling sufficiently similar to the accepted usage.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance rendered to me by the personnel at the Public Record Office and the India Office Library, the various university libraries that I visited around the country, the House of Lords Record Office and the British Museum. Dr. M. L. Dockrill has been most patient and helpful in the production of this work. His knowledge of the literature of the period and subject have been invaluable, as has his judicious editing and criticisms. Finally, I could not have completed this work without the moral and spiritual assistance of my God and my parents.




LOWER MESOPOTAMIA

# CHAPTER 1

## WHY MESOPOTAMIA?

Before undertaking the study of the British-Indian campaign in Mesopotamia, it is important to understand why Great Britain should become involved in hostilities with Turkey in the first place. With her resources committed to such a great extent in France, and the struggle there far from sure, Britain seemed to have little reason to enter into a second front far from home. Nevertheless, Britain went to war in the Middle East in November 1914, following Turkish aggression against Russia. Within a week of the bombing of Sevastopol, Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' began operations against Fao at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab. The landings there took place within twenty-four hours of the official British declaration of war. Since the operations could not have been planned and executed overnight, it is obvious that this force had been committed to action in the Persian Gulf for some time. This quick action confirms that Mesopotamia was important enough to require British invasion. Why should Force 'D' have been committed here rather than elsewhere on the frontier, such as Palestine or Syria? The original plans, dating back as far as 25 August, were for the India Office to prepare a force 'for safeguarding the refinery in case of an attempt being made to interfere with it'[1] and to despatch two gunboats to keep the Shatt-al-Arab open

[1]Memo, no. M01496, ADM to IO, 25 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/43049.

for operations.

The protection of the refinery of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company on Abadan Island, at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, has generally been regarded as the main reason that the British took such an interest in the Persian Gulf during the war. 'In [Liddell Hart's] view the Force's objectives were primarily strategic. In 1914, the Abadan oil stores and Persian petroleum fields of the Gulf were "essential" to Great Britain; I.E.F.'D' was despatched in order to secure them from Turkish attack.'[1] From the point of view of the Admiralty, which needed this facility as a supply base for naval fuel and toluol (for the manufacture of explosives[2]), this is a logical reason. In reality this was not the main reason, although 'Hart's interpretation has since become part of English folklore.'[3] Sir Edmund Barrow, Military Secretary to the India Office, said on 26 September 1914 that an operation in the Persian Gulf area would be 'ostensibly to protect the oil installation but in reality to notify the Turks that we mean business and to the Arabs that we are ready to support them.'[4] This is confirmed by the fact that plans for the actual protection of the refinery, pipeline and oil fields were not finalised before 22 October 1915[5] and even those plans were not put into effect. Rather, in February 1916, the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir

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[1] S. Cohen, British Policy in Mesopotamia, 1903-1914, (London, 1976) p. 299.

[2] M. Kent, Oil and Empire, (London, 1976), p. 119.

[3] Cohen, p. 299.

[4] P. Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 1914-1918, (Oxford, 1965), p. 43.

[5] Report of Departmental Committee of the Defence of the Persian Oil Fields, 22 Oct 15, IO/L/P&S/10/487/P.3665.

Beauchamp Duff, stated that 'the manner in which the oil fields should be protected must be left entirely to the discretion of the General Officer Commanding, Force 'D'.'[1] This is hardly a comprehensive battle plan for the operations of an entire theatre.

The British involved themselves in Mesopotamia for three basic reasons, only one of which concerns Admiralty oil; they were also concerned with the expanding foreign, especially but not exclusively German, economic interests in the Persian Gulf, where Great Britain had long enjoyed a most-favoured status. Finally, Britain was striving to maintain good Anglo-Arab relations. Oil security and political and economic considerations weighed heavily in British policy, but did not occupy British attentions in the years 1914-1916 as much as did the fear of an Arab-led holy war against the British. However, in the two years preceding the war the threat of German intervention in the area preoccupied the Foreign Office.

The major German incursion toward the Persian Gulf came in the form of the Baghdad Railway. This was by no means the only German interest in the area, but it foreshadowed the entrance of German commerce on an ever-increasing, and perhaps all-encompassing, scale. Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, later wrote:

> What Germany really wanted was a place in a temperate climate and a fertile land, which could be peopled by her white population and be German, part of the German empire and under the German flag. . . . These were the inexorable facts of the situation, and if the talk about a 'place in the sun' was translated into terms of practical application and of fact, it became two things--Walfisch Bay [in southwest Africa] and the Baghdad Railway.[2]

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[1] Tel. no. P.717, Duff to Chamberlain, 4 Feb 16, IO/L/P&S/10/487.

[2] Sir E. Grey, Twenty-five Years, (New York, 1925), vol. 1, p. 118.

Germany viewed the completion of the railway line from Berlin to Baghdad in 1916 as a thread tying together a future 'political and economic federation'[1] which would establish Germany as the major power of Mitteleuropa, stretching from Germany, through Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria to the Ottoman Empire in a monopoly that would secure Germany's political, economic and military future.

Before the war, the Baghdad line was to be a commercial venture. 'The Baghdad Railway project, or, to give its official title, "La Société Imperiàle Ottomane du Chemin de Fer de Baghdad", was definitely launched in 1903 by a diplomatic agreement, dated 5 March, between the Turkish Government and a syndicate of Germans.'[2] The railway's aim was 'to divert the Levantine, Indian and Far Eastern trade from the sea lanes to London overland to the Reich.'[3] It was this diversion of trade routes that worried the British about Mesopotamia. German money supported both the Baghdad Railway Company and the Turkish Anatolian Railway Company. Railway lines had existed since the turn of the century extending east from Constantinople, and the proposed Baghdad line was to be built as an extension east of Konia, some 300 miles south-east of the Turkish capital. From Konia it would pass through the Taurus Mountains to Alexandretta, Aleppo and Mosul to Baghdad.[4] Work on the line proceeded from both ends, but it was slower from Baghdad because

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[1] F. Fischer, War of Illusions, tr. by Marian Jackson, (London, 1975) p. 240.

[2] M. Jastrow, The War and the Baghdad Railway, (Philadelphia, 1917), p. 82.

[3] W.W.Gottlieb, Studies in the Secret Diplomacy during the First World War, (London, 1957), p. 22.

[4] F.W.Halsey, Literary Digest History of the World War, (New York, 1919, vol. 8, pp. 8-9, 14.

of the difficulties of transporting materials up the Tigris from Basra. Native craft had to be used extensively on the Tigris owing to a lack of dependable motorised craft to navigate the winding and uncertain river.[1] The link between Nisibin, some 300 miles east of Aleppo, and Baghdad, another 300 miles south-east, was incomplete in 1914 and not projected to be finished before the end of 1916. The whole line between Baghdad and Constantinople was intended to be opened a year later[2] after the construction of two tunnels through the mountains.

The exact role of the Baghdad Railway in pre-war politics is a subject of speculation. Many sources cite it as a major part of German foreign policy and a project that excited the imagination of the German people. Even if its origin was strictly commercial, its development was highly political. Arthur von Gwinner, Director of the Deutsche Bank (which financed German participation in the line) pointed out to the Kaiser that the Baghdad Railway 'was not a commercial undertaking but a political one, since it would reflect the position of the German Empire, its prestige in the world, its financial power and economic expansion.'[3] If one accepts the idea that German policy was to create an empire through 'Mitteleuropa',then the railway becomes a symbol of German imperialism and can easily be seen as a major factor in increasing tensions between the European Powers before the war. Fritz Fischer states:

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[1]Tel. no. 430, Birdwood to IndGovt, 8 Apr 14, FO/371/2131/15587.

[2]Ibid.,

[3]F. Fischer, 'World Policy, World Power, and German War Aims', in H.W.Koch, ed., The Origins of the First World War, (London, 1972), p. 95.

> In 1914 Mitteleuropa was seen essentially as a hegemony on the Continent and as a foundation for her as a World Power alongside the other World Powers, since the control of the main arteries of traffic in all directions and of the most industrialised part of the world, that is Europe, would make the German Empire equal to the powerful countries of America, Russia and the British Empire, in extent of territory, in size of population and resources.[1]

This is emphasised by early German commercial ventures in the Middle East. The original plans for the line's construction through the Ottoman Empire called for a route through Persia, but this was blocked by Russia in a 1911 agreement. A similar attempt to build a line to Alexandretta met French resistance. Thus, Germany took the central route to Baghdad, that indirectly threatened both Russia and France, and confronted the British directly.

This threat expanded further when the contract between Germany and Turkey was made public. 'One of the articles in the convention of 1902-1903 . . . stipulated that the road was to be used by the Turkish Government for military transportation, and the German company had to pledge itself to build military stations along the route.'[2] Should the line be completed, and these outposts be constructed alongside it, then Germany 'should have, even in a future war, all necessary raw materials--by means of the Baghdad Railway--without the enemy being able to hinder [them].'[3] German political parties, such as the Young Liberals, envisaged 'an economic federation, a so-called "central European customs union" which included the German Reich, Austria-Hungary,

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[1] Fischer, 'World Policy', p. 125.

[2] Jastrow, p. 134.

[3] Dr. P. Rohrbach, lecture, 'Germany and the Middle East', in Hamburger Fremdenblatt, 3 Dec 15, IO/L/P&S/10/101/B221.

and the Balkans, with German hegemony being silently taken for granted.'[1] The planned confederation had offensive as well as defensive military significance. Von der Goltz saw early in the war that a completed Baghdad Railway would be vital as a supply line in an invasion of Egypt, or perhaps even India.[2] 'A safe position in the interior of Asia Minor gave [the railway] unique strategic value for the imminent struggle with Britain.'[3] Given that the Ottoman Empire was a declining Power, the establishment of German imperial aims toward Turkey and the Middle East was a cause for deep concern among the other European Powers. Should the Ottoman Empire collapse, Germany was in a key position to profit most from its fall. 'In London, Dr. Gwinner, a director of the Deutsche Bank, during negotiations over the Baghdad Railway, implied that an actual partition of Asia Minor was under consideration.'[4]

This possibility of Turkish dismemberment struck close to British interests in Mesopotamia, especially south of Baghdad. Britain was sure that once the railway was completed, Basra and the Persian Gulf were the next logical extensions of the line. The British saw that this could lead to the establishment of German political influence, as well as the possibility of German military or naval posts on the Gulf. The Foreign Office wanted British participation in the construction of an extension to Basra as soon as possible, so they approached the German

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[1] Fischer, War of Illusions, p. 232.

[2] U. Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, (Princeton, 1968), p. 291.

[3] Gottlieb, p. 22.

[4] H.S.W.Corrigan, 'German-Turkish Relations and the Outbreak of War: A Reassessment', Past and Present, no. 36, April 1967, p. 145.

and Turkish Governments to negotiate for British cooperation in the area. 'The general idea of the negotiations on the Baghdad Railway was that the Germans should cede the southern section of the railway to us, and that we should consent to a 4 per cent. increase in Turkish customs'[1] wrote Grey. Talks in mid-1912 centred on the amount of control the British would be able to exercise over the construction and operation of the line. The Foreign Office originally requested to participate financially in the railway's construction, but on 18 July 1912 proposed to the Ottoman Government that they were 'prepared to withdraw their request for British participation in the railway from Baghdad to Bussorah, if a satisfactory agreement is arrived at on other points.'[2] In order to ensure 'that British interests of whatever character were fully safeguarded', Sir Edward Grey told Tewfik Pasha, in London to negotiate for the Ottoman Government, that Britain wanted two representatives on the board of any company that undertook to build the Baghdad-Basra railway,i.e., fifty per cent. control. Grey mentioned at the same time that the British had 'consistently maintained that a satisfactory settlement of the Baghdad Railway question was a necessary condition of their assent to an increase in Turkish customs duties.'[3] In spite of this threat, and the fact that Germany needed additional capital to construct the line, Turkey refused to agree to the British considerations, which amounted to half-British control of a railroad in

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[1] Grey, vol. 1, p. 245.

[2] Memo, no number, Grey to Tewfik Pasha, 18 Jul 12, IO/L/P&S/10/60/10135.

[3] Ibid.

which they had no investment and which operated totally within the confines of the Ottoman Empire and not directly in a British sphere of influence.

Talks resumed in 1913, and in June 1914 the British and Germans agreed on a convention 'destined to prevent all cause of misunderstanding'[1] between the two countries in regard to the railway. Britain got her two directors on the board of the proposed Baghdad-Basra rail project, plus the controlling voice in any line from Basra to the Gulf. In return for this, the British promised not 'to encourage' the German venture, as the Germans wanted the clause phrased, but 'to do nothing to discourage' the advance of the Baghdad Railway.[2] Prince Lichnowsky, German Ambassador to London, claimed that Germany 'achieved more than the founders of the railway had dreamed of. . . . I succeeded in obtaining Basra as the terminus, though we had already given up hope of it.'[3] Britain's Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company, plying their steamship trade between Basra and Baghdad, received a guarantee that no German firm would compete on that route,[4] although the German company of Wonckhaus continued to operate in competition with them on the Karun River into Persia and at other points around the Gulf. This Anglo-German agreement followed a Franco-German pact signed in February 1914 concerning French railway construction in Syria which set out spheres of influence in the area for France and Germany and guaranteed

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[1]German-British Convention, Baghdad Railway, 16 Jun 14, IO/L/P&S/10/415/2341.

[2]Ibid.

[3]J. Rohl, 1914: Delusion or Design, (London, 1977), p. 98.

[4]German British Convention, Baghdad Railway.

non-interference within those spheres.[1]

Although the Anglo-German agreement guaranteed a British voice in the affairs of the German-controlled railway company, it also guaranteed a German economic foothold in the area heretofore predominantly British. Britain had been the source of sixty per cent. of the Mesopotamian imports in the pre-war era and controlled some thirty to forty per cent. of the imports into Asiatic Turkey.[2] Still, Germans expanded their share of the Persian Gulf trade through 1913-14 and planned an even further business growth. 'The Berlin-Baghdad line, the embodiment of Drang to the Middle East, was reaching out for the copper of the Taurus, the oil of Kerkuk, the tobacco, wool, cotton, grain and fruits of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, and one of the richest markets in the world for German manufactures.'[3] Using the shipping firm of Wonckhaus, and the Hamburg-Amerika line, Germany traded drugs, railway material, cotton goods, woollen goods,glass, liquors, paper, arms and ammunition, for Gulf exports of poppy seed, linseed, sesame, gum, wool, almonds, shells, intestines, tobacco, carpets, opium, dates and oil.[4] In addition, Germany expanded her trade into the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Some Germans brought their own businesses and some came with the railroad, both attempting to extend German services and influence throughout the Empire. When, for example, in March 1914, the Vali (governor) of Basra asked that suggestions be made by European firms for city improvements,

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[1] Minute by Alwyn Parker, Board of Trade(BoT) to FO, 27 Feb 14, FO/371/2131/9553.

[2] Letter, no number, Stanley (BoT) to Parker, 11 Jul 14, FO/371/2136/31713.

[3] Gottlieb, p. 22.

[4] 'German Competition in Arabistan and Persia', IO/L/P&S/10/336.

British representatives found that Germans had already begun surveys of the area to study such projects as tramways, electric lighting, etc. Mesopotamia 'seemed destined to afford a stage for full German penetration.'[1]

It was not only the expanding German interests that worried Britain. Austria-Hungary and Italy both claimed mining rights in Asia Minor,[2] and the Russians in northern Persia seemed to come into increasing friction with the British. Britain and Russia had drawn up spheres of influence in a 1907 agreement which cut Persia roughly into three sections; the Russian trade was in the north and the British in the south and Persian Gulf, with a neutral zone between the two. 'The Anglo-Russian convention reconciled the long-standing differences between the two empires, and Britain's old enemy became her quasi-ally.'[3] 'By partitioning Persia [Grey] prevented Germany from advancing the railway from Baghdad overland to Teheran and also thwarted the plan of . . . Russia for a trans-Persia railway.'[4] Even so, the British position was not stable. The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf reported to India in late 1913 that 'Russian influence has steadily increased in the Russian zone, and is now admittedly predominant . . . both commercially and politically' in the capital of Teheran, and that Britain must be on guard against 'the wedge of Russian influence driven down the Karun',[5]

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[1] S.H.Longrigg, Iraq: 1900 to 1950, (London, 1953), p. 66.

[2] Tel. no. 133, Buchanan to Grey, 5 May 14, FO/371/2134/20880.

[3] W.D.Puleston, High Command in the World War, (London, 1934), p. 17.

[4] Ibid., p. 18.

[5] Tel. no. 3713, Cox to IndGovt, 7 Dec 13, IO/L/P&S/10/133/2315.

the river that meets the Shatt-al-Arab at Mohammerah. Likewise, the Russians feared British encroachment in the northern sphere when the Admiralty gained a major share of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, a move which was hailed in Russia as 'equal, in the disastrous nature of its effect on Russia, to an unsuccessful war.'[1]

It was the oil question that was the second major reason for British interest in Mesopotamia, although their investment in oil there was limited. Although the British attempted to gain oil rights throughout Mesopotamia, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and its fields in south Persia were the focal point of British interests.[2] This company had been formed in 1901 by W. K. D'Arcy, and he gained from the Persian Government in May of that year 'special and exclusive privilege to search for, obtain, exploit, develop, render suitable for trade, carry away, and sell natural gas, petroleum, asphalte, and ozokerite throughout the whole extent of the Persian Empire for a term of 60 years.'[3] This all-British company seemed a perfect source of supply of fuel to the Royal Navy which, in the immediate pre-war years, was converting its ships from coal to oil as a means of power. In January 1913 the First Sea Lord directed the War Staff to set about finding a steady source of supply and reserve for the Navy, and to set out a projection of needs in both peace and war. Churchill pointed out that since the 'basis of our whole defensive policy is the command of the sea' then 'it may be assumed that for a purpose so vital as the supply of oil to the Fleet

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[1]Letter no. 191, Buchanan to Grey, 24 Jun 14, IO/L/P&S/10/410/2753.

[2]For a full survey of this subject, see M. Kent, Oil and Empire, and H. Mejcher, Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq, 1910-1928, (London, 1976).

[3]Anglo-Persian Oil Company's Concession, 28 May 1901, ADM/116/3806/12053.

in time of war'[1] price would be no object, yet a reliable source of supply would be necessary, no matter what the cost. While oil was available from Burma, Texas, Mexico, California, Romania, Borneo and Trinidad,[2] none of these sources offered the advantage of being controlled by the British Government.

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company courted Admiralty interest, claiming impending financial troubles. Even though the Persian fields were successful('a bore-hole seldom being completed without yielding oil'[3]) the Company informed the Admiralty in October 1913 that in order to exploit the fields and expand the operations, a large investment was necessary from an outside source. They hinted that they could sell a major share to some foreign company and get the capital 'by availing ourselves of the offers which have been, and are still being, pressed upon us from certain quarters.'[4] If this were to happen, however, Admiralty interests would suffer and total British control of the fields would be lost, 'neither of which contingencies will occur if the Government will come to a prompt decision.'[5] The Admiralty hesitated while awaiting an official survey they had commissioned by Admiral Sir E. Slade, which reached them in December 1913. The report stated that the Anglo-Persian Company could, with the output of the fields around Maidan-i-Naphtun alone, 'supply the Admiralty with 500,000 tons of fuel in the year

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[1]Memo, no number, First Sea Lord to War Staff, 8 Jan 13, ADM/116/1219/4013.

[2]Memo, no number, War Staff to First Sea Lord, no date, ADM/116/1219/4013.

[3]Extract from 'Oil News, 4 Oct 13, ADM/116/3806/26644.

[4]Tel., no number, Anglo-Persian Oil Co. to ADM, 17 Oct 13, ADM/116/3806/27224.

[5]Ibid.

1917-18 and to continue that supply annually for the following 17 years.'[1] In addition, the other fields looked just as promising and the possibility of oil production on the Persian Gulf itself at Mohammerah, a concession gained in June 1913,[2] seemed to confirm that the company would have no trouble supplying oil to meet Admiralty needs. Finally, in a conference held early in January 1914, the Admiralty decided it would buy shares in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in order to ensure the Company's solvency and the Fleet's fuel needs. The Admiralty proposed a contract for 300,000 to 500,000 tons a year for twenty years, with a 400,000 ton reserve supply.[3] The Admiralty gained a long-term, fixed-price contract when oil prices were just starting to rise.

During the January conference the question of protection of the oil fields arose. Sir Percy Cox, Persian Gulf Chief Political Officer, reported to the Admiralty his estimate that a force of from two brigades to a division was necessary to guard the fields against minor local disturbances, and if a war should break out it was possible that more men would be required.[4] Churchill, who had pioneered the investment in this project, ignored it after the war broke out in August. He stated on 1 September 1914 that there was 'little likelihood of any troops being available for this purpose: . . . We shall have to buy our oil from elsewhere. . . . Europe and Egypt have greater claims than we

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[1]First Interim Report of the Admiralty Commission on the Oil Resources, Persian Gulf, 17 Feb 14, ADM/116/3806/12503.

[2]Tel. no number, Townley to Grey, 18 Jun 13, ADM/116/3806/27960.

[3]Proceedings of the oil conference held in Delhi, 5 & 7 Jan and 7 Mar 14, FO/371/2131/10237.

[4]Ibid.

have on the Indian Army.'[1] This idea was in direct opposition to the Foreign Office assurance of May 1914 that the oil field personnel could 'count on such support and protection as British subjects are always entitled to expect from His Majesty's Government' because, since the Admiralty was to become a major stockholder, they 'as a matter of self-interest . . . must necessarily have a greater interest than hitherto in all measures that may be necessary for the safe and uninterrupted prosecution of the enterprise of the company.'[2] However, such was not to be the case. 'During the early part of the campaign, Mesopotamia was clearly not a major battleground, and oil, whether Persian or Mesopotamian, was not a major factor in planning military strategy.'[3] In spite of this later lack of interest, the Admiralty became a major stockholder in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company with a total subscription of £2,200,000.[4] Thus, much as Disraeli had done in acquiring the major share of the Suez Canal, Churchill obtained for the British Government a major advantage for the strategic superiority of the Royal Navy.

This acquisition met with the approval of the India Office, which believed that this move would aid the British position in the Persian Gulf by widening governmental interest in the area.[5] The Russians, as

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[1]Puleston, p. 119.

[2]Letter, no. CP14784, W.G.Greene to USSInd, 8 May 14, FO/371/2131/20258.

[3]Kent, p. 118.

[4]Agreement with Anglo-Persian Oil Co., Ltd., and ADM, IO/L/P&S/10/410/2463.

[5]Memo no. 2255, IO to FO, 11 Jun 14, IO/L/P&S/10/133/2255.

mentioned earlier, were not at all pleased. They too realised the similarity between this action in Persia and the Suez acquisition in relation to British political influence in Egypt, and therefore felt that the British were encroaching on Russian interests in Persia without having previously discussed the move with her. Russian public opinion viewed this as a violation of the 1907 agreement. The Petersburgh Courier stated that Britain might be forced to 'take the consequences of exploiting the idiocy of others. The leader of the Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs is a Russian at whose services are Russian diplomacy and the greatest army the world has ever seen.'[1] Although the British influence that was gained in the purchase of the oil shares extended no further north than the neutral zone, Britain decided that it was not advisable to argue with the Russians over such a point at a time when friends were necessary. In July 1914 Buchanan, Ambassador to Russia, suggested to Sir Edward Grey that since the British interests were primarily in developing the southern fields, then perhaps it was worthwhile to offer Russia some part of the northern fields.[2] Grey agreed, but did not want to give away any territorial concessions outright. Grey told Buchanan that he 'felt that it would be to our interest at any rate to lease the part of the concession in the north to some other company, which might be an Anglo-Russian company.'[3] Before this offer to buy off Russia was advanced, however, the outbreak of war

[1]Letter no. 191, Buchanan to Grey, 24 Jun 14, IO/L/P&S/10/410/2753.
[2]Tel. no. 152, Buchanan to Grey, 7 Jul 14, IO/L/P&S/10/410/2776.
[3]Tel. no. 290, Grey to Buchanan, 22 Jul 14, IO/L/P&S/10/410/3022.

and the resulting shift of Russian interest elsewhere made the offer unnecessary.

As the British were trying to entrench themselves economically in Ottoman and Persian territory, they also intensified their political efforts around the Persian Gulf to increase their influence there. Negotiations with the Turkish Government culminated in the signing of a Persian Gulf convention on 29 July 1913 which recognised Britain's influence and treaties around the Gulf. These treaties covered relations with the sheikhs of Koweit, Bahrain, Mohammerah and Abu Dhabi concerning piracy, arms trading, slave trading and postal agreements dating back as far as 1820.[1] After almost a century of official involvement, British influence in the Persian Gulf rested 'not only on the agreements concluded. . . but on custom, consent, and long-established relations between local chiefs and the Government of India.'[2] As tensions mounted in the summer and fall of 1914 the political positions of these sheikhs became more important. The British Consul in Arabistan realised the advantage that Britain had in having 'control of this country through the Sheikh . . . and any lessening of his authority will act to our detriment. The greater the power of the Sheikh the greater our control.'[3]

It is the position of Britain in regard to these sheikhs, and, more important, the control the sheikhs would exercise over their followers,

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[1]Conventions between the United Kingdom and Turkey respecting the Persian Gulf and Adjacent Territories, 29 Jul 13, FO/371/2136/31036.

[2]Memo, no number, Grey to Tewfik Pasha, 24 Oct 11, IO/L/P&S/10/60/786/13.

[3]Memo by Maj. Howarth, Arabistan Consul, 7 Dec 13, IO/L/P&S/10/133/3215.

that is the third and most important reason for British military involvement in this area. As war neared, Britain's greatest fear in this part of the world was not so much German control or loss of oil as it was that the Moslem Arabs of Mesopotamia, with Turco-German urging, would rise up in a Jehad, or holy war, that would spread throughout the region from Arabia to Egypt, and through Persia and Afghanistan to India. The Basra Consul reported in August 1914 of agents leaving from there to stir up Moslem feeling in India,[1] and throughout the campaign in Mesopotamia the British administration went to great lengths to assure the local Arabs that the British had no intention of disturbing their religious practices.[2] As deeply involved as the British Army was in France, the possibility of a weakening or loss of the British influence in the Middle East and the possibility of that weakness spreading to India was extremely frightening, as little could be done to stop a Jehad should one begin. The importance of British control in this area was noted by a German author in 1915, who quoted Lord Curzon's statement that '"The possession of India is the inalienable badge of sovereignty in the Eastern Hemisphere. Without India the British Empire could not exist." For England everything centres around India, and Arabia is the glacis for the defence of India.'[3] Thus, the British support of Arab movements against the Turks, tacit though it was prior to the war, grew stronger to serve the double purpose of keeping the

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[1]Secret tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 18 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/40911.

[2]'A Sketch of the Political History of Persia, Iraq and Arabia, with Special Reference to the Present Campaign", pamphlet by Cox, Costello Papers, Imperial War Museum,74/80/1.

[3]Extract from 'The Fight for Arabia between Turkey and England', F. Stuhlman, published in Germany, 1916, IO/L/P&S/10/101/B241/P4540.

Arabs' religious feelings quiet and attempting to raise their support against the Turks.[1] 'The officials who sanctioned the despatch of the force in 1914, no less than those who discussed Britain's Mesopotamian desiderata in 1915, considered that the maintenance of the status quo would serve Britain's strategic, commercial and political interests in the region.'[2]

This double interest in the Arabs, for Turkish harassment and British stability, occupied British diplomacy in the Gulf area, and the Turks and Germans were not blind to British fears. Subversive Arab activities directed at the Turkish Government were suppressed by local authorities both by the arrest of dissidents and by counter-propaganda. British interest was aroused when the Turks arrested an Arab nationalist, Aziz Ali Bey, in March 1914, a man who had connections in Egypt with friends of Kitchener. Aziz Ali Bey led a group that claimed to have definite schemes to liberate the Arabs from Mosul to the Gulf, and had attempted to enlist the support of the Sheikh of Koweit, an important British ally.[3] At Kitchener's request, Louis Mallet, British Ambassador in Constantinople, made enquiries into the arrest but found that his questions aroused Turkish suspicions. British fears of Turkish hostility plagued Anglo-Arab relations prior to the war. Mallet realised that if he took too great an interest, 'and in the event of their plans maturing the Turkish Government [would] easily jump to the

[1]Tel. no. 117, Mallet to Grey, 2 Mar 14, FO/371/2131/9033.

[2]Cohen, p. 308.

[3]Tel. no. 117, Mallet to Grey, 2 Mar 14, FO/371/2131/ 9033.

conclusion that His Majesty's Embassy was implicated in the affair.'[1] It was thus that British interests in the Arabs involved a precarious stance of supporting the revolutionaries while not giving the Turks, after 4 August, an excuse to go to war. Kitchener seconded Mallet's desire for caution when he saw that British support of Moslem pilgrimages enhanced British prestige in India and Egypt.

The Arabs had no intention of submitting to the policy of centralisation that the Young Turks attempted to institute. Arab pamphlets calling for revolt were rife throughout the Ottoman Empire in 1914, most using religious arguments. The standard pamphlet, after detailing Turkish atrocities against Arab people and Moslem culture, ended with something like 'the first thing you ought to do is refuse paying your taxes and to buy arms to expel these destroyers from your country. History has taught us a lesson which should be written in gold: "that no nation obtained its freedom except after the ground soaked with blood."'[2] Grey saw that this hostility might be turned to good advantage and recommended to the India Office that should Turkey declare war, the India Office should 'at once give every support and encouragement to the Arabs to possess themselves of Arabia and the Holy Places.'[3] As helpful to the British cause as this would have been, this suggestion was instituted only to a limited extent. Most of the support for the Arabs in Mesopotamia was moral rather than physical.

The Turks and Germans responded with propaganda of their own,

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[1]Tel. no. 117, Mallet to Grey, 2 Mar 14, FO/371/2131/ 9033.

[2]Translation of a pamphlet by the Arab Revolutionary Committee, 25 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/42807.

[3]Secret memo, FO to IO, 1 Sep 14, FO/371/2139/44923.

mainly in Persia, with Germany trying to incite a Jehad against the British as persecutors of Moslems, while similar attempts came from the Turks within Ottoman territory. A pamphlet from Nasiriyah, on the Euphrates River, called on Moslems from all over the world to aid Turkey as the leader of the true faith. The pamphlet asked if any Moslems were 'permitted by their religion to fight against their brethren of Islam . . . causing death unto them and theirs; or do they merit the torments of Hell as murderers in so doing? God Almighty knows.'[1] The Turks became more anxious about the loyalty of the Arabs under Turkish rule when mobilisation started in August 1914, directed by Djavid Bey, Minister of Finance and Public Works and also Inspector of the 4th Inspectorate (military district). When conscription went into effect, Djavid stated that those who did not respond 'to the invitation made by the Muhammedan religion' to join the army would be, 'without loss of time, shot.'[2]

The main hope the British held for Arab support was in the alliances with the Persian Gulf sheikhs, and even this contact was threatened. The Sheikh of Mohammerah, an old ally, reported early in September 1914 'that Turks are steadily endeavouring to arouse religious fanaticism. . . .if they are successful he will be able to do nothing against them & will only keep his tribesmen out of it with considerable difficulty.'[3] This made for rather difficult projections of policy when leaders agreed to one position which their subjects might not

[1]Papers of Brig. E.W.Costello, Imperial War Museum no. 74/80/1.

[2]Tel. no. 825, Baghdad Consul to Mallet, 10 Aug 14, FO/371/2143/54157.

[3]Secret tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 7 Sep 14, FO/371/2141/47168.

follow. Britain needed the Arabs' support, either active or passive, to guard against a religious uprising. Thus, talk began in September 1914 among the British leadership of possible post-war Arab states free from Turkish rule, yet dependent on British influence. The only way to plan for such an eventuality was by wholeheartedly supporting the sheikhs and hoping they could control their tribes. The Foreign and India Offices therefore cultivated their alliances with the Sheikhs of Mohammerah and Koweit and the Emir of Nejd, Ibn Saud, who was 'no friend of the Turks and disposed to be friendly toward us.'[1] To ensure their position with the powerful Emir, the British Political Officer in Arabia, Captain W. H. I. Shakespeare, an old companion of Ibn Saud, was called out of retirement in early October to exercise his influence '(1) to prevent the outbreak of unrest or disturbances among the Arabs; and (2) to ensure . . . that no assistance is rendered by the Arabs to the Turkish arms.'[2]

Turkish action grew increasingly hostile through September and October 1914. Enver Pasha, Turkish Minister of War, warned the Vali of Basra to prepare for Turkish entry into the war against Britain and told him to make ready to receive 'arms and ammunition . . . being sent to Basra under German flag and that 32 secret emissaries including German officers are on their way to preach Jaad (sic) in Afghanistan Baluchistan and India.'[3] War seemed to be inevitable to almost everyone in the Ottoman area except Louis Mallet in Constantinople, who seemed to

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[1]Tel. no. 604, Mallet to Grey, 22 Sep 14, FO/371/2140/57234.

[2]Secret letter, IO to Shakespeare, 5 Oct 14, FO/371/2143/57141.

[3]Secret tel., Hardinge to Grey, 28 Sep 14, FO/371/2140/53904.

make a regular practice of ignoring or disbelieving all indications that the Turks were about to commit themselves. He received reports, and passed them on to London, of continued military activity, such as the fact that the Turks would 'probably send troops to Egyptian . frontier--as now indicated'[1] or that Turkish agents were travelling through Mesopotamia to foment Arab inter-tribal hostilities and secure support for the Government.[2] Mallet countered that he 'did not seriously believe that the Ottoman Government seriously contemplate active participation in the war on the German side.'[3]

Luckily, others in powerful positions refused to be so blind. Sir Edward Grey continued to play down Anglo-Arab relations (to keep from providing Turkey with 'an unanswerable case before the world, and especially the Moslem world'[4]) but closer relations were maintained with the sheikhs after 4 August by the Political Agents who made sure that the tribal chiefs were accurately informed on the war situation, to counter 'false and exaggerated items of information published in the Basra journal . . . and spread abroad by Turkish agents and other ill-informed or ill-disposed persons.'[5] The sheikhs welcomed the arrival of British forces in late October and gave pledges of support in case war with Turkey should occur.[6] The political agents in the Gulf area worked to

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[1]Tel. no. 893, Mallet to Grey, 30 Sep 14, FO/371/2140/54619.

[2]Tel. no. 1051, Mallet to Grey, 24 Oct 14, FO/371/2140/63065.

[3]Tel. no. 893, Mallet to Grey, 30 Sep 14, FO/371/2140/54619.

[4]Tel. no. 659, Grey to Mallet, 11 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/58203.

[5]Tel. no. C39, Political Agent, Koweit to Cox, 19 Oct 14, FO/371/2144/82713.

[6]Secret tel., Hardinge to Grey, 24 Oct 14, FO/371/2140/63562.

keep Moslem feelings cool in the face of Turco-German propaganda, and their efforts proved successful when war finally came. From all over India and the Persian Gulf the British and Indian Governments received massive amounts of assurances of undying loyalty from virtually every tribal and civil group.[1]

These promises were apparently not enough to satisfy the India Office, which undertook the military operations in Mesopotamia. Maintaining Arab respect was throughout the campaign a major factor in decision-making. The military actions preceding the outbreak of hostilities centred on two strategies, designed to impress the Gulf population. Both were designed to demonstrate British strength without provoking an incident that the Turks could use to blame the British for starting hostilities. Since the defence of the Mesopotamian-Persian Gulf-Persian oil field area had not been the subject of any planning (the India Office stated in May 1914 that they 'doubted very much we could spare the necessary force from India to protect this area'[2]) the best that could be done on short notice was to increase the amount of patrols carried on by the Indian Marine gunboats in the Gulf. This was instituted in August 1914, soon after the war in Europe and Turkish military activity in the area began to increase. In mid-August Viceroy Lord Hardinge of Penshurst thought that 1000 sepoys should be despatched on these steamers to take up defensive positions around the oil installations, but he decided that such a move would be too provocative.[3] The India Office

[1]Various Indian civil groups to IndGovt and British Govt, Nov 14, IO/L/P&S/10/518.

[2]Minute no. 2248, Barrow, 8 May 14, IO/L/P&S/10/410/2248.

[3]Secret tel, Hardinge to ADM, 21 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/42068.

believed that the continued presence of the gunboats was vital, since 'the political feeling of the people . . . is principally influenced by what they see.'[1]

The second strategy was more difficult to organise, and could not be implemented until much later. The Viceroy and Secretary of State for India began in late September and early October to organise an expeditionary force to go to the Gulf in case of hostilities. Sections of the Indian 6th Infantry Division began to be assembled for transport to Karachi, where they would embark for the Persian Gulf. This force was the core of what was to become Force 'D', and its function in Bahrain was to give the Sheikh moral support. It was due to arrive about 23 October.[2]

Thus, with the Navy in action and the Army on the way, there was not much the British could do but await Turkish moves. In mid-August the Turkish gunboat 'Marmaris' began steaming about Basra, and the Vali there claimed that the Turkish Government might requisition all supplies of coal and oil in Basra.[3] Reports reached Bushire, further down the Gulf coast, on 22 August, that Germans were attempting to sink an old Turkish ship in the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab to bar the entrance to British ships.[4] By 5 September Turks were reported at the island of Shemsumiyah, near Mohammerah, sounding the river,[5] and by the 8th guns

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[1]Memo no. 3305, IO to FO, 22 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/42068.

[2]Tel. no. H1469, Hardinge to Grey, 13 Oct 14, FO/371/2143/59061.

[3]Tel., no number, Cox to IndGovt, FO/371/2136/39348.

[4]Tel. no. 997, Bushire Political Resident to Hardinge, 22 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/42068.

[5]Tel. no. 697, Mallet to Grey, 5 Sep 14, FO/371/2138/46751.

had been placed there.[1] The Admiralty countered these moves by ordering the three steamers in the area to the Shatt-al-Arab 'to patrol from Mohammerah to the sea to prevent any interference with the navigation by the Turks.'[2] Their arrival met with an immediate Turkish response. 'They declare the whole of Shatt-al-Arab and sea within six miles of shore to be territorial waters and closed to warships. Guns at Fao will fire on any man-of-war disregarding prohibition.'[3] To this the Admiralty suggested that the Foreign Office inform Constantinople that as regards warships in territorial waters, 'so long as the Turkish Government does not intern the German War Vessels "GOEBEN" and "BRESLAU", His Majesty's Government will maintain a Naval Force in the Shatt-al-Arab.'[4] Apparently Grey was losing patience with the Turks because now his orders to the ships were not designed to avoid conflict, as had been his policy in the past.

Grey ordered the ships to remain at Mohammerah and 'to keep outside Turkish territorial waters, which according to the generally accepted principle of international law, extend 3 miles out to sea from the coast.'[5] By mid-October the Turks countered this British stand by announcing that they would mine the Shatt-al-Arab. The Admiralty and Foreign Office now began to throw caution to the wind. On 23 October they protested about the restriction of their rights to navigate

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[1]Tel. no. 721, Mallet to Grey, 8 Sep 14, FO/371/2138/47600.

[2]Tel. no. 160, ADM to CinC East Indies, 10 Sep 14, FO/371/2141/48549.

[3]Tel. no. 939, Mallet to Grey, 6 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/56618.

[4]Confidential letter, ADM to FO, 20 Sep 14, FO/371/2142/51192.

[5]Tel. no. 644, Grey to Mallet, 7 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/56618.

the river, which had been reaffirmed as late as July 1913 in the Anglo-Turkish conventions. Grey stated that the British Government would be 'forced to regard any attempt to lay mines in the river as an act of open hostility and provocation to this country.'[1] By the 26th the gunboats in the Gulf were 'to watch for any signs of mine-laying and to be prepared for orders to prevent it by force.'[2] On the 30th the ships received instructions on minesweeping procedures and were told that 'should the Turks open fire . . . the mining vessel if present is to be destroyed and further operations taken as you deem necessary.'[3]

As tension mounted on the water, Turkish troops began to arrive in the area, although it is uncertain how many there were. In late August Mallet reported the despatch of 1,000 men to Basra, but they were 'mutinous from neglect and ill-treatment. One officer has been killed already and hundreds have deserted.'[4] By 24 October reports to the Indian Government told of 300 men and four guns on Shemsumiyah Island, where the Karun meets the Shatt-al-Arab at Mohammerah.[5] By the time war broke out, most Turkish troops were in the west, and Indian Army headquarters estimated that there were only 10,000 men in Mesopotamia, some 8,000 infantry, 500 cavalry and 58 guns in the neighbourhood of Basra.[6] Expeditionary Force 'D' was only brigade strength, some 5,000

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[1]Tel. no. 698, Grey to Mallet, 23 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/62013.

[2]Tel. no. 242, ADM to SNO,Persian Gulf, 26 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/63558.

[3]Tel. no. 724A, Grey to Mallet, 30 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/65507.

[4]Tel. no. 621, Mallet to Grey, 26 Aug 14, FO/371/2136/43529.

[5]Tel. no number, Bushire Political Agent to IndGovt, 24 Oct 14, FO/371/2142/63042.

[6]Maj. E. Evans, A Brief Outline of the Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, (Aldershot, 1927), p. 17.

men, when it reached Bahrain. Political Agents throughout the Gulf region were told to give the 'utmost publicity to its presence, making it known that His Majesty's Government contemplate no aggressive action.'[1] The officer in command of Force 'D', Brigadier-General Sir W. S. Delamain, was instructed not 'to land troops on Turkish territory without orders from [the Home Government] except in case of absolute military necessity.'[2]

Whether that military necessity would occur or not depended on the actions of the Young Turks in power in Constantinople. Mallet remained unconvinced that they would go to war. He was sure that the pitiable condition of Turkish finances and morale would prevent a war 'simply to gratify the vanity of a fatuous young idiot like Enver and a mad German general like Liman [von Sanders].'[3] Mallet continued that the Turks must 'not think we are afraid of their absurd preparations, but if they go to war . . . we shall in all probability call them to account.'[4] By the time Turkey joined hostilities on 29 October, Britain was prepared to 'call them to account.' Within a week Force 'D' was on Turkish soil and had taken Turkish lives.

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[1]Secret tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 26 Oct 14, FO/371/2140/65496.

[2]Memo no. 1144, Barrow, IO, to E.A.Crowe, FO, 3 Oct 14, FO/371/2143/56196.

[3]Letter, Mallet to Sir W. Tyrell, undated, FO/800/80.

[4]Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2
## OPENING MOVES
## NOVEMBER 1914-APRIL 1915

Although hostilities with Turkey did not lead to Indian action until 6 November 1914, India had been on a war footing since August. When Great Britain went to war, the Home Government called on India to provide a force for France. Britain also took Indian officers at home on leave and pressed them directly into the Regular Army. These two actions considerably weakened the Indian Army. Force 'A', in France, consisted of the 3rd and 7th Divisions and a cavalry division. The Indian Army was further weakened when the War Office directed the despatch of Forces 'B' and 'C' to East Africa and Egypt. Force 'B' consisted of a brigade of regular and Imperial Service troops (at the outset) and Force 'C' was made up of various detachments to support the troops already in Egypt, and was later used in East Africa. Military Secretary to the India Office, Sir Edmund Barrow, minuted that 'this leaves us in India with only just sufficient troops to form three infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade for defence of the Frontier.'[1] Thus, the formation and despatch of Force 'D' to the Persian Gulf in October 1914 was not, at its inception, a popular move in India.

On 20 September 1914, Viceroy Hardinge informed Sir Beauchamp

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[1]Brig. Gen. F.J.Moberly, History of the Great War based on official documents: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, (London, 1923-27), 4 vols., vol. 1, pp. 80-81.

Duff, Commander-in-Chief in India, that he was worried about how far they could go in meeting Imperial requests without leaving India totally unprotected. Hardinge wanted to stand fast against any weakening of the Frontier defence force, and he thought that any British battalion that left the country for overseas duty ought to be accompanied by an Indian battalion. India should get 'a fair and adequate proportion of Territorial regiments in exchange.'[1] The reason he wanted equal representation was owing to the fear in India of possible religious disagreement with the war against Turkey, should she join in. Hardinge had been warned by British officials in the provinces that they were anxious over 'the possible effect on Mahommedan feeling in India of any action which the Entente . . . may be forced to take in regard to Turkey.'[2] The religious question plagued the Indian Government continually through the war, although it was a fear realised only on rare occasions.

The British feared a holy war that would, under Turkish direction, spread through Mesopotamia to Persia, Afghanistan and India. Thus, the Indian Government kept close watch on the activities and attitudes of the Persians. Hardinge informed the Foreign Office in September that he planned to seize the Gulf ports if Persia moved to ally herself with Turkey, but he hoped to 'preserve her integrity and actively support her administration in the south'[3] while the Russians need

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[1]Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 20 Sep 14, Hardinge Papers (HDG) 101/2/308.

[2]Letter, Gov.-Gen. Bayley to Hardinge, 14 Aug 14, HDG88/1/144.

[3]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 10 Sep 14, FO/371/2480/48551.

fear nothing as long as they remained passive in their northern zone of influence. The Persian Prime Minister assured the British Ambassador in Teheran that Britain could rest assured of Persia's sympathies, as sympathies were 'all . . . she had left to fight with.'[1] If war should break out, he would declare Persia neutral. The Persian authorities held good to this promise, discouraging Turco-German activities[2] and announcing their neutrality on 4 November 1914.[3]

The deteriorating diplomatic situation with Turkey forced Britain to order a demonstration at the head of the Persian Gulf with Force 'D'. In addition to halting the spread of Jehad preaching, Britain had to move into the Gulf because she was, according to Barrow, 'morally bound to protect' the Gulf sheikhs who had been such long-standing British allies. 'I think we should have lost face tremendously if we had not done so, and the Arabs would certainly have thrown in their lot with the Turks.'[4] This is the first but by no means the last time that 'saving face' was used as a reason for action in Mesopotamia. The idea of impressing the Arabs was an ever-present driving force in decisions which expanded this campaign beyond the limits of its original intentions. The Mesopotamian Arabs respected nothing but victory (as shown by their merciless treatment of defeated troops), and the British and Indian leaders, rightly or wrongly, grew to equate forward motion with victory in order to persuade the Arabs to remain passive.

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[1]Tel. no. 247, Townley to Grey, 1 Sep 14, FO/371/2480/45426.

[2]Tel. no. 292, Townley to Grey, 2 Oct 14, FO/371/2480/55375.

[3]Tel. no. 411, Knox to IndGovt, 4 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/88231.

[4]Mesopotamia Commission (Meso Comm)proceedings, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, CAB/19/8, nos. 240-44. All Meso Comm proceedings are contained in CAB/19/8, so only date of testimony and numbers of questions cited hereafter.

In September 1914, however, British intentions in the Persian Gulf were still limited. On 26 September, Barrow minuted to the Secretary of State for India, the Marquess of Crewe, that British agents in the Gulf were convinced that some form of action was needed to convince the Arabs of British support in order to secure their favour. Barrow stated that an Indian force sent immediately to the Shatt-al-Arab would serve this function. 'We can easily do so at the present moment without arousing any suspicion. . . . The Expedition, if despatched under sealed orders, could arrive at the Shatt-al-Arab without a soul knowing anything about its despatch for this purpose.'[1] When the Mesopotamia Commission questioned Barrow on this point, he stated that the possibility of such a move had been contemplated in India for many years and Indian military authorities 'had no doubt prepared plans.'[2] General Sir O'Moore Creagh, formerly Commander-in-Chief in India (1910-1914), told the Commission that in 1912 he had submitted a report detailing a campaign in Mesopotamia entitled 'Overseas operations in the event of a war with Turkey, either alone or supported by Germany.'[3] Duff stated that he knew nothing of such a report. According to an agreement between the War Office and the Indian General Staff, the former formulated plans for Arabia and Mesopotamia while the latter's authority ended with the Persian Gulf and Basra.[4] What little was known of the Shatt-al-Arab area, however, was collected and added to the orders that Brigadier W. S. Delamain opened when his 16th Brigade

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[1]Minute by Barrow, 'Role of India in a Turkish War', 26 Sep 14, WO/106/52.

[2]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, nos. 186-88.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, nos. 14636-40.

[4]Moberly, vol. 1, pp. 69-70.

was sailing for the Gulf. This brigade of the 6th Infantry Division was assembled at Bombay and departed from the port on 16 October. Delamain's orders directed him only to occupy Abadan Island, in order to protect the oil facilities and assure the Arabs of support. If hostilities began, then he was permitted to expand his hold as far as Basra while awaiting the remainder of the division.[1]

Hardinge was dubious of the wisdom of this action while the tenuous peace with Turkey remained. Hardinge was still unsure, in early October, of the Persian Government's attitude, and he feared that the Abadan operation could not be carried out 'without the risk of a protest from the Persian Government and without in the event of war violating Persian neutrality. Both these results would be regarded unfavourably by Indian Mohammedans,'[2] not to mention giving the Turks an excuse to violate that same neutrality and gain a commanding position. The Viceroy advocated gaining Persian permission to land troops near Abadan, as the island itself might be considered to lie in Turkish waters. Thus, any move by Turkey would result in their breaking international law, not Britain.[3] Arthur Hirtzel, the India Office Political Secretary, thought Hardinge's fears 'overstated'. Since the oil works were British-owned, and their policing was the concern of a British ally, the Sheikh of Mohammerah, then any Indian force occupying Abadan would merely be protecting their own property from possible Turkish interference.[4]

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[1]Orders to Brig. Delamain from CGS Ind, 8 Oct 14, WO/106/880.

[2]Pvt. tel., Viceroy to Crewe, 5 Oct 14, IO/L/MIL/5/768.

[3]Letter, Hardinge to Crewe, 15 Oct 14, Crewe Papers (CRW), C/24.

[4]Memo by Hirtzel, 8 Oct 14, WO/107/877, p. 5.

The question soon became academic. The 16th Brigade; at Bahrain since 23 October, received notification of war and directions to proceed to the Shatt-al-Arab on 30 October. The force arrived at the bar across the entrance to the Shatt on 3 November and waited there for two days while mine-sweeping operations were carried out. On the 5th Delamain received confirmation that Britain had declared war on Turkey.[1] Delamain's Plans of Operations were fairly open-ended, probably because India could not really know what to expect. 'The local consular and other authorities will, it is hoped, be able to assist you.'[2] He was warned to expect some 3,000 semi-trained Turkish troops in the Basra vicinity. Later sources state that some 5,000 men of the Turkish 38th Division, with 32 guns, were above Mohammerah; these were mostly Arab troops, with one Anatolian battalion.[3]

Hardinge anticipated little trouble in dealing with this force. In spite of his anxiety over creating an incident that would provoke the Turks, he was more than ready to fight them now that hostilities had actually begun. 'I should be glad for an incident to arise so that the whole situation might be cleared up, especially as I think we should have no difficulty whatever in taking Basra and raising the whole of Arabia against Turkey,'[4] he wrote to Lord Crewe. Crewe's directions to Force 'D', however, ignored Hardinge's comment on an Arab uprising and their consequent friendliness. Although the political agent with Force 'D', Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Percy Cox, informed

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[1] A.J.Barker, The Neglected War, (London, 1967), p. 41.

[2] Letter, CGS Ind to Delamain, 8 Oct 14, WO/106/880.

[3] Quetta Staff College, Critical Study of the Campaign inMesopotamia up to April 1917, (Calcutta, 1925), p. 5.

[4] Letter, Hardinge to Crewe, 29 October 14, CRW/C/24.

the Secretary of State that the Gulf sheikhs' attitudes ranged from 'cordial' to 'staunch',[1] Crewe reiterated that nothing should be done to provoke the local tribesmen. He directed Hardinge to impress on Force 'D' the 'necessity of conciliating [the] Arabs in every possible way.'[2]

As the 16th Brigade advanced, the Indian Government had to urge caution first on Delamain, then on Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Barrett, who arrived to take command of the force with the remainder of the division on 15 November. This caution was invoked not only to keep the tenuous foothold secure, but also to watch closely the political situation in Persia and among the Arabs. Although Persian neutrality was official from 4 November, the British knew that the Anglo-Russian alliance, strengthened by the outbreak of war in Europe, was not popular in Persia. While Force 'D' strove to avoid provoking Persia, the Foreign Office also put pressure on Russia to avoid any possible conflict. Sir George Buchanan in St. Petersburgh requested Serge Sazonov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to direct Russian personnel in Persia to maintain a 'benevolent attitude' in view of the outbreak of war with Turkey.[3] Although there was little harmony in Turco-Persian relations, it was recognised throughout the Middle East that Turkey was the last remaining Moslem Power, and war against a co-religionist might, it was feared in London and Simla, transcend Turco-Persian enmity. Accordingly, Sazonov instructed his personnel that any 'act that may arouse resentment against us and awaken Moslem

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[1]Tel. no. 378, Cox to FO, 12 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/71276.

[2]Tel. no. 1375, Crewe to Hardinge, 16 Nov 14, IO/L/MIL/5/748.

[3]Pvt. tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 2 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/82713.

fanaticism which would be highly dangerous from our point of view also must be carefully avoided.'[1]

The main source of possible trouble in Persia seemed to be the minorities, such as the Kurds in the north who might embark on guerrilla actions against the Russians.[2] This threat was counteracted, however, by the possibility of an Armenian uprising in support of the Russians, as the Armenians had long suffered at Turkish hands.[3] The Foreign Office believed that the best way to control these elements in Persia would be to bring that country into an alliance against Turkey. Grey was prepared to offer, in conjunction with the Russians, 'political, territorial or economic inducements'[4] to convince Persia to join the Allies. Grey's main concern with this scheme was with prestige and world opinion. In order to attack Turkish troops and protect British interests in Persian territory, it might be necessary to traverse her soil to do so. Grey did not want any unfortunate parallels drawn with Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality.[5] Russian authorities disagreed with Grey's idea, Buchanan pointing out that, since Persia had no army, she had little to offer and would thus become a liability should Turkish troops invade. Sazonov proposed that a simple assurance to the 'Persian Government of friendly sentiments animating Russia and Great Britain'[6] would suffice to secure Persia's friendly neutrality. Thus, throughout the war, Allied operations

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[1]Pvt. tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 5 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/82713.

[2]Tel. no. 296, Townley to Grey, 8 Oct 14, FO/371/2144/57458.

[3]Letter, Francis Kirby (late Acting Vice-Consul, Rostov) to Grey, 6 Nov 14, FO/371/2146/68443.

[4]Tel. no. 1006, Grey to Buchanan, 10 Nov 14, FO/371/2480/69647.

[5]Tel. no. 1015, Grey to Buchanan, 12 Nov 14, FO/371/2480/70280.

[6]Tel. no. 645, Buchanan to Grey, 14 Nov 14, FO/371/2480/71281.

through Persian territory were allowed while Teheran protested against Turkish actions which infringed Persian neutrality.

Indian Army moves in 1914 and early 1915 were slow and deliberate, though this was dictated by necessity as much as by policy. Delamain quickly attacked Fao on the morning of 6 November, but the subsequent debarkation of troops on the 8th at Sanniyeh was a two-day operation from ship to shore, there being no docking facilities available.[1] With Barrett's arrival, operations began in the direction of Basra. On 15 November Delamain and three battalions 'successfully accomplished after a sharp engagement'[2] the occupation of Saihan on the right bank of the Shatt-al-Arab below Mohammerah. Crewe told Hardinge the next day that if the 'political situation as regards Arabs is favourable, and if [the] military situation renders immediate advance both practicable and advisable',[3] then Barrett had Cabinet approval to capture Basra. Once taken, Basra 'should be considered a friendly and not an enemy town, and every effort made to restore confidence.'[4]

With these orders, Barrett advanced up the Shatt. On the 18th his forces marched nine miles and defeated a force of 4,500 Turks at Sahil. Barrett informed India that a hospital ship was 'much needed',[5] a request that, coupled with the lack of river craft, foreshadowed future problems of movement on the rivers of Mesopotamia. This was emphasised on 20 November when Barrett reported difficulty in landing

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[1] Barker, Neglected War, p. 42.

[2] Tel., no number, GOC'D' to Crewe, 15 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/71853.

[3] Tel. no. 1375, Crewe to Hardinge, 16 Nov 14, IO/L/MIL/5/748.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Tel. no. 34G, GOC'D' to CGS Ind, 18 Nov 14, WO/95/4965.

troops and stores, a condition aggravated by the ships' deep draught and the activities of Turkish artillery.[1] Dependent on shipping for supplies, the capture of Basra became a necessity if Force 'D' was to remain operative. Determined to push through to the city by force on 22 November, Barrett was saved the trouble when word reached him the day before that the Turks had evacuated Basra and the town was being looted by Arabs of one of the desert tribes. An advance force steamed up-river immediately and the remainder entered the town on the 22nd, accompanied by Navy ships firing salutes as the Union Jack was raised.

Barrett reported that local Arabs who had been pressed into Turkish service had refused to follow the Turks up-river, being 'much dissatisfied with their treatment by Turks.'[2] Hoping to exploit this dissatisfaction, Cox read a proclamation to the assembled citizens that Britain had not desired war with Turkey, but had been forced into it. She had no desire to fight anyone except the Turks, so Basra would enjoy the 'benefits of liberty and justice both in regard to your religious and secular affairs.'[3] The proclamation also stated that the former Turkish administration was to be replaced by a British one, a move later interpreted as the first stage of annexation. The inhabitants of Basra seemed content that the British would protect them from the Turks and assumed that the previous administration would never return.

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[1]Tel. no. 47G, GOC'D' to Crewe, 20 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/73932.

[2]Tel. no. 57G, GOC'D' to Crewe, 24 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/74868.

[3]Basra Proclamation by Sir P.Z.Cox, 23 Nov 14, WO/95/4965.

At this point, a mere two weeks and seventy miles into the campaign, the idea of capturing Baghdad first appeared. No sooner had Percy Cox entered Basra than he wired to Hardinge that he 'found it difficult to see how we can avoid taking over Baghdad.'[1] This idea was seconded by the Sheikh of Koweit who telegraphed Cox on 25 November: 'Your victories have delighted me; next, please God, you will take Baghdad and what is connected with it.'[2] Cox's telegram of 22 November is generally regarded as the first mention of the idea of a longer advance, but in reality the move had been considered when Britain first declared war. Hardinge wrote to Crewe on 5 November that Basra should fall easily, then 'it will be time enough to consider what further action we can take in the direction of Baghdad.'[3] In another letter that same day, he admitted that the 500 miles between Baghdad and Basra was a 'serious matter' but he thought it possible that the Arabs could capture and hold the city. With the Russians operating in the Caucasus, the Turks could not afford to spare the troops to recapture it.[4] Thus, Cox's proposal fell on sympathetic ears.

By the 25th, Cox and Barrett were studying the 'topographical details bearing on the question . . . in case that course should be decided on.'[5] Cox thought that the lack of high-quality Turkish troops, the reportedly pro-British population of Baghdad, and the good weather all argued in favour of immediate action while the effects of the

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[1]Stephen Longrigg, Iraq: 1900 to 1950, (London, 1953), p. 78.

[2]Pvt. tel., Sheikh of Koweit to Cox, 25 Nov 14, FO/371/2479/1081.

[3]Letter, Hardinge to Crewe, 5 Nov 14, CRW/C/24.

[4]Letter, Hardinge to Sir Valentine Chirol, 5 Nov 14, HDG/93/2/244.

[5]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 25 Nov 14, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

opening British victories were still fresh. Baghdad could only serve as an irritant in Turkish hands, and as a base for further hostile operations. The latest reports stated that the city was held by only 2,000 troops.[1] Hardinge supported the idea to some extent, telling Duff that taking Baghdad would assure Arab cooperation and would 'make [Turkish] expulsion from Arabia almost a certainty.'[2] Nevertheless, he realised the possible disaster that could occur should such a quick move with inadequate forces be thwarted. Thus, the first hint of expansion in Mesopotamian policy began to form: 'What a pity it is that we ever wasted any of our troops in East Africa',[3] a glimpse of future attempts to secure the return of Indian troops fighting in other theatres. Hardinge also theorised about the possible return of two brigades from duty in Egypt if the General Staff thought the Baghdad advance feasible. He realised that, in spite of the vast political advantages that would accrue, the 'military aspect comes first, the political situation is dependent upon it.'[4] Duff agreed. 'Politically it offers much advantage; and if I were in a better position in regard to available troops I should not hesitate.'[5] Thus, Cox had support of his belief in 'the impossibility of getting down to a purely passive defence if the Arabs of Iraq were to co-operate with Great Britain.'[6]

Luckily, London overruled such plans. While all Cox's political

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[1] Tel. no. 616, Cox to IO, 25 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/75321.

[2] Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 25 Nov 14, HDG/102/2/805.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 25-26 Nov 14, HDG/102/2/807.

[5] Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 25 Nov 14, HDG/102/1/968.

[6] Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, (London, 1941), p. 182.

arguments, echoed by Hardinge, rang true, the authorisation to advance could have produced no more chance of success than did the attempt a year later, and for the same reasons: not enough transport, not enough troops. Although the transport difficulty had not yet made itself widely felt, the first hints of it have already been noted. As for the troops, Crewe commented on this. 'In the absence of extensive power to reinforce we must not cut more cake than we can eat.'[1] Crewe favoured control rather than forward movement as the means to maintain a hold on Mesopotamia. Although the India Office would frequently preach caution over the following months, more and more authority began to fall on the 'man on the spot', which was to cause much debate at the Mesopotamia Commission. Nevertheless, on 27 November 1914 Crewe ordered plans for Baghdad to be dropped 'as there are grave international considerations involved',[2] although an advance to Kurna was authorised.

This advance was supported by Barrow in a lengthy minute to the Secretary of State. Again, the argument in favour of the advance was 'prestige.' Barrow's first point in his 27 November minute stated that 'a policy of passive inactivity is to be deprecated if we are to continue to impress the Arab and Indian world with our ability to defeat all designs against us.'[3] Further, and more to the point tactically, Kurna's position at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates, where they form the Shatt-al-Arab, controlled the entire waterway to the Gulf that deep-draught ships could employ. Possession of the area up to Kurna gave the British control of extensive telegraph lines and all

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[1]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, statement.

[2]Tel. no. 1418, Crewe to Hardinge, 27 Nov 14, FO/371/2144/82190.

[3]Minute by Barrow, 27 Nov 14, WO/106/877, pp. 10-11.

the most fertile Mesopotamian land. Barrow also noted that Persian Arabistan would be 'completely' covered and safeguarded from Turkish intrigues. (This notion of 'complete' coverage would be used again to support thrusts to Ahwaz, Amara, and Kut-al-Amara.) Strategically, it would give London the time necessary to gauge Arab sentiment and 'frame a policy for the future.'[1] As it was to turn out, although the time was available for careful planning, it was not done by either India or the India Office, and disjointed control of the campaign was to end in its almost total disintegration after Ctesiphon.

However, with short-range policy in hand, Barrett quickly moved on Kurna. A force of some three battalions embarked and steamed up-river on the evening of 3 December. It arrived and immediately deployed to attack the following morning. Well-concealed Turkish artillery kept the force at bay and little progress was made. The detachment was reinforced to five battalions with supporting guns on the 5th and another attack on the Turkish positions ensued the following day. The troops were barred from the town by the Tigris as much as by the Turks, and it took a river crossing above the town on 8 December and a concerted two-pronged assault to surround the Turks and force their surrender.[2] Thus the site attributed to the Garden of Eden became British property, as did the entire Shatt-al-Arab and its environs. Barrett ordered the occupation of Shaiba on 4 December as an anchor for the desert flank.

An Indian Government report on the campaign's inception later

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[1]Minute by Barrow, 27 Nov 14, WO/106/877, pp. 10-11.

[2]Barker, Neglected War, pp. 51-55.

stated: 'Our prestige was restored. A position of great strategical importance had been secured with little loss. The friendly Arabs were confirmed, at least for the time being, in their loyal attitude, and the oil works at Abadan had been saved from destruction.'[1] 'With everything settled militarily, temporarily anyway, a British administration began to be organised. Order had been restored upon British arrival, and several Arabs caught looting had been hanged. Cox and Barrett recommended a military administration and appointed officers to direct martial law.[2] Cox assumed that India would be the final administrative authority, and Crewe confirmed this on 11 December, on the grounds that local control should be handled on the spot, rather than from London, as 'Sir E. Grey will not wish to be consulted regarding administrative matters which do not raise international questions.'[3] The new authorities found that 'the area was in an indescribably filthy condition with plague, smallpox, cholera, dysentery, malaria and typhus, endemic, no sanitary system, and the river and creeks the sole source of water supply.'[4]

As the local administration began to deal with these problems, larger plans were being conceived for the area as a whole. These plans concentrated, not surprisingly, on impressing local Arabs. Sir William Willcocks, who had extensively surveyed the area before the war, suggested to the India Office that a railway line should be built. He claimed that the Baghdad Railway had strongly impressed the inhabitants, and that a British line would inspire the Arabs to 'more readily go

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[1] 'Precis of Correspondence Regarding the Mesopotamian Expedition: Its Genesis and Development', WO/106/877, p. 8.

[2] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 5 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/79449.

[3] Letter no. P4726/14, Holderness to FO, 11 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/81737.

[4] G. Buchanan, The Tragedy of Mesopotamia, (Edinburgh,1938), p.5.

against the Turks, whom they hate like poison.'[1] Willcocks stressed that the railway would lead to the idea of a permanent British occupation. Sir Eyre Crowe of the Foreign Office wrote on 4 December that lower Mesopotamia not only represented a vast commercial interest worth claiming, but annexation would convince the Arabs that the British meant to bar the return of 'the hated Turkish overlords.' He recommended that Cox study the situation and submit a report on the best method of establishing British influence.[2]

Cox recommended immediate annexation of Basra. Hardinge seconded this, saying that British supremacy in the Gulf would be permanently established, the oil works would be safeguarded, the local sheikhs would be more strongly tied, the Baghdad Railway terminus question would be resolved, and the area's commerce would prove profitable. Further, to abandon the area after even a temporary occupation would destroy Arab faith in Britain,[3] assuming there was any faith in the first place. Hardinge wrote privately to Lord Curzon stating that the Shatt-al-Arab area was easily defensible owing to the navigation and supply difficulties any invading force from up-river would undergo.[4] Cox proceeded with the argument that the immediate need was to pacify the Arabs if 'we wish countryside both here and [at Kurna] to settle down quickly.'[5]

It was the 'grave international considerations' which led to the

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[1] Letter, Willcocks to IO, 30 Nov 14, FO/371/2480/1413.

[2] Minute by E.A.Crowe, FO, 4 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/78661.

[3] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 7 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/85892.

[4] Letter, Hardinge to Curzon, 14 Dec 14, IO/L/EUR.MSS./112/106.

[5] Tel. no. 88, Cox to IndGovt, 10 Dec 14, FO/371/2482/14120.

veto of the Baghdad advance, and which also stopped the announcement of permanent occupation. Crewe telegraphed Hardinge that such a proclamation 'would be regarded as definite breach of the understanding between allies that final settlement must await [the] end of the war.'[1] At this early stage, no promises could be made to Russia or France as to annexations, especially of Constantinople, which Russia greatly desired, although that reluctance would change in time. December 1914 was still too early to make promises: '. . . although we are absolutely confident of ultimate result, the war has not reached a state which justifies annexations.'[2] Sir Edward Grey agreed totally with Crewe's answer and reasoning,[3] but Cox consistently argued that something concrete had to be offered to the Arabs. Hardinge was finally able to secure permission for Cox to unofficially and privately tell the local sheikhs and notables that the Turks would not be allowed to return to reinstate their pre-war authority.[4]

In spite of the attempts by both the Foreign and India Offices to calm the expansionist desires directed towards Mesopotamia, the official pronouncements did little to curb speculation about the possibility of gaining territory, especially Baghdad. Perhaps Hardinge and Cox were somewhat encouraged by Crewe's explanation of the Cabinet's refusal to sanction the early advance. The tone of Crewe's private telegram to Hardinge was one of regret at circumstances forcing a delay, for Crewe stated 'I quite agree as to our permanent interest there.'[5]

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[1] Pvt. tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 9 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/85892.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Letter no. 81737/14, FO to IO, 15 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/81737.

[4] Letter no. 85892/14, FO to IO, 25 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/85892; pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 19 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/85892.

[5] Pvt. tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 30 Nov 14, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

Cox began to alter his arguments for the city's capture from a quick action to a methodical advance. 'We might . . . expect to gain without bloodshed and by negotiation possession of Amara and so on by stages to Baghdad: our communications being made good as we go.'[1] Cox depended heavily on cooperation by the Tigris Arab tribes. He advocated ignoring the hostile Euphrates tribes as much as possible while using the offices of the Sheikhs of Mohammerah and Koweit, plus the threat of possible Russian domination from the north, as openings to friendly relations along the Tigris. Further, if the decision against the Baghdad advance was really due to lack of troops instead of the avowed political considerations, Cox had an idea to counter that point. He wrote to Hardinge that, after studying Crewe's telegrams on the subject, it was 'difficult to avoid conjecture that His Majesty's Government do contemplate in abstract ultimate control of British in Mesopotamia',[2] and he had a fairly easy answer to the problem of a shortage of troops. He reasoned that among the millions of men engaged in France, 'the presence of a Division, more or less, of Indian troops . . . could hardly have any appreciable effect on the ultimate issue of the war in Europe.'[3]

There was probably no one more imperialistic where Mesopotamia was concerned than Sir Percy Cox, but he was not alone in his fixation with Baghdad. While he was arguing with India and London in November and December, the question of Baghdad was being quietly and unofficially discussed among top-level personnel. Grey was approached by Lord

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[1]Tel. no. 82-B, Cox to IndGovt, 3 Dec 14, FO/371/2479/17000.

[2]Letter, Cox to Hardinge, 18 Dec 14, HDG/102/1/1111.

[3]Ibid.

Inchcape, who had considerable dealings with the river commerce in Mesopotamia before the war. Inchcape pointed out the suitability of Cox, in his key position as Chief Political Officer, as agent for bringing Mesopotamia 'under civilised and decent Government.' To control Baghdad would control the trade centre of Mesopotamia and would weaken Turkish prestige while it would raise that of the British. 'Now is our chance to get hold of the Baghdad-Busreh section of the Baghdad Railway . . . and to make the Gulf what Lord Lansdowne said it ought to be, a British lake.'[1] Grey passed these arguments on to the India Office, showing that even at the highest governmental levels Baghdad could not be forgotten. In spite of the official line of 'grave international considerations', Crewe admitted that he would 'be prepared to consider that step to Baghdad in due course. But for the moment military considerations predominate.'[2]

Crewe reiterated this in a letter to Curzon dealing with Baghdad and Mesopotamia. The shortage of troops dictated a cautious policy, both personal and political. Crewe noted that since Mesopotamia was the only campaign directed entirely by his office--'our Indian ewe-lamb'--it was regrettable that so many troops had gone on to other expeditions under War Office control. Thus he could not risk defeat so far inland, following which 'we should have to slink back towards the Gulf, which would be humiliating and quite destructive of our credit locally.' Thus Kurna became the objective rather than Baghdad:

'. . . it gives us a good winning position in the game of chess, if not quite so brilliant a one as the possession of Baghdad would.'[3]

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[1]Letter, Lord Inchcape to Grey, 3 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/78661.

[2]Letter no. P4796/14, IO to FO, 12 Dec 14, FO/371/2144/82190.

[3]Letter, Crewe to Curzon, 4 Dec 14, IO/L/EUR.MSS./F112/106.

So Baghdad was again pushed aside for the moment as Kurna fell and the British consolidated their hold on the Shatt-al-Arab. Apparently their fear of a religious uprising was groundless, at least temporarily. In late November the Sultan in Constantinople declared a Jehad, but the effect in Mesopotamia and Persia was negligible. Cox informed Hardinge that 'the appeals which emanated from the Mujtehids of Mesopotamia are regarded by local sheikhs as having been issued under forcible pressure by Turkish authorities and the idea is ridiculed of there being any cause for a holy war.'[1] The proclamation was also ridiculed in Constantinople, where Liman von Sanders noted that 'the holy war bore the appearance of unreality because Turkey was allied with Christian States and German and Austrian officers and men were serving in the Turkish Army.'[2] Thus, any Arab answering the call of Jehad could technically have fought against either or both of the opposing forces in Mesopotamia. As it was, the Arabs could be defined as friendly or hostile depending on their proximity to the battle line; and most of the Arab troops fighting in the Turkish Army were either imported or impressed. Ibn Saud was the only major Arab leader in the Mesopotamian area to form a new alliance with the British,[3] but he never actively supported them in hostilities. His stand may, however, have influenced other tribes into passivity, if not open support of Force 'D', but this is open to speculation.

The attitudes of the Arabs varied from tribe to tribe, so the British could never be sure of any place being continually hospitable.

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[1]Letter, Cox to Hardinge, 18 Dec 14, IO/L/EUR.MSS./F112/106.

[2]Liman von Sanders, Five Years in Turkey, (Annapolis, 1927), p. 35.

[3]Tel. no. P4767, Hardinge to Grey, 29 Dec 14, FO/371/2479/201630.

Taking this into account, it is not surprising that, soon after the occupation of Kurna, other Arab strongholds became the subjects of discussion as possible military targets. The local sheikhs from Amara assured Cox that the Arabs could disperse the Turkish force on the Tigris and give Amara to Force 'D' without a fight.[1] 'The Amara town possesses considerable commercial importance and from an administrative point of view it would be convenient if the district came under our control', Cox explained to Hardinge, but Cox could not make a full recommendation until he had 'fuller knowledge than we now possess as to present and ultimate intentions . . . of His Majesty's Government.'[2] This lack of a formulated policy did not deter Barrow from advocating moves to pacify Arab tribes. Whereas Cox looked to Amara and Arab cooperation, Barrow concerned himself with possible Arab hostility on the Euphrates. Barrow saw Nasiriyah as a point of departure for a Turkish flanking attack on Basra, a manoeuvre which actually took place in March and April 1915. Nasiriyah in British hands would give Force 'D' control of the Euphrates, which flowed to Kurna and Basra.[3] Hardinge opposed any such move, as Kurna was strategically sound and any move from there involved a great increase in the lines of communication.[4] This was, unfortunately, the last time Hardinge would object to an advance for this reason.

The question of an advance was not forgotten, but as the new year began those ideas were held in abeyance for a few weeks as the situation

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[1]Tel. no. 93-B, Cox to IndGovt, 12 Dec 14, FO/371/2482/14120.

[2]Tel. no. 108-B, Cox to IndGovt, 20 Dec 14, FO/371/2482/14120.

[3]Minute by Barrow, 14 Dec 14, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

[4]Letter, Hardinge to Chirol, 17 Dec 14, HDG/93/2/270.

concerning Persia and the Arabs remained unsettled. Both the Turks and the Allies still courted Persian support. Owing to a military necessity, Russian troops were withdrawn from part of northern Persia where they faced a Turkish force. Sazonov urged the British Ambassador in Teheran to make all the political use he could of this withdrawal, giving out that it was a voluntary move in order to meet the wishes of the Persian Government. Thus, the Persians would have reason to protest against the presence of Turkish troops who remained in the area, perhaps even bringing Persia to the point of severing relations with Turkey.[1] The troop withdrawal only concerned a few hundred men being transferred to another front, but the Russians did not want it construed as a Turkish victory. This move apparently had little effect, as Hardinge noted that rumours of a Turco-Persian military alliance were still rife. Given that Persia had no military capability, Hardinge speculated that a British war against her could be profitable. Since he saw Britain keeping as much of the Gulf area as possible, the Viceroy wrote that such a conflict 'will give us the opportunity of seizing the islands or anything that we may consider desirable from that moribund state.'[2] In the light of his constant complaints concerning lack of troops, for offence or defence, it is fortunate that Hardinge kept such opinions private. Cox was able to keep a balance between the two diverse ideas of Hardinge and Sazonov, reminding the Indian Government that Persia was too difficult to defend with available forces and that her neutrality, aided by British 'material assistance', remained the most advantageous alternative.[3]

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[1]Pvt. tel., Crewe to Hardinge, 4 Jan 15, FO/371/2479/17000.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Nicolson, 6 Jan 15, FO/800/377.

[3]Tel. no. 31-B, Cox to IndGovt, 8 Jan 15, FO/371/2479/17000.

Persia remained, however, a target for Turkish propaganda, especially of a religious nature. One editorial of the time spoke of an 1894 speech of Gladstone's in which he blamed the Koran for upsetting world peace, and it claimed that the present British Government maintained Gladstone's attitudes by waging war against Moslem nations. 'This she does to find profitable markets for her avaricious traders, carrying out her policy under religious pretexts so as to secure for herself the support of her fanatical subjects.'[1] (The author refrained from mentioning that the Jehad was announced with much the same religious pretext to support Germany's economic and military goals.) The British still feared the possible spread of holy war and even conducted discussions with the French to map out religious strategy.[2] Sources in the Gulf region had a more realistic view. The Koweit Political Agent 'stated definitely' that there was never any question of the Arabs fighting a holy war declared from Constantinople. He reported that everyone realised the political rather than the religious nature of the war. In fact, the Arab upper classes, who knew the facts of the situation, sympathised with Great Britain. The sympathy was due 'partly to past experience of Turkish misrule, and partly to the conviction that the Turkish official who systematically robs pilgrims to Mecca . . . cannot be regarded as a good Moslem.'[3]

Whether for political or religious reasons, the Turks considered the Arabs unreliable. They had originally planned to employ the major Arab tribes from the Gulf to the Suez against the British, but actions

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[1]Tel. no. 279, Townley to Grey, 1 Jan 15, FO/371/2478/352.

[2]Letter, Bertie to Grey, 1 Jan 15, FO/371/2480/1942.

[3]Tel. no. C-57, Political Agent, Koweit to IndGovt, 6 Jan 15, FO/371/2483/21664.

of the Sharif of Mecca and Ibn Saud effectively secured the British hold on both east and west.[1] The revolt led by the Sharif of Mecca never directly affected the Mesopotamian Arabs, but the support, albeit rather passive, of Ibn Saud was believed to be a major political victory for the British. Ibn Saud's battle against the Turkish-supported Ibn Rashid in late January was somewhat inconclusive, but it did manage to keep Rashid from supporting Turkey to the extent Constantinople had hoped. The India Office foresaw Saud's possible importance in post-war Arabia and urged the Foreign Office to conclude a treaty with him not only for 'the immediate services which he is expected to render but also for the political power for mischief which . . . he will possess and if permanently estranged will doubtless exercise.'[2] Although a treaty that Ibn Saud had made with the Turks the previous May was discovered, Hardinge claimed that the Turkish hostilities directed by Germany effectively abrogated that treaty. He urged the conclusion of a treaty guaranteeing Saud's independence and maintenance in return for a most-favoured-nation status.[3]

As the political manoeuvrings of early January followed their course, the military situation remained fairly quiet. Kurna was reinforced and strengthened, but came under intense sniping and harassment. On 20 January Barrett ordered a raid on Turkish positions up the Tigris, both to show the locals that the force could and would keep fighting, and to keep the troops from becoming stale through inaction.[4]

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[1]Tel. no. S.1316, CGS Ind to WO, 19 Jan 15, FO/371/2479/11837.

[2]Letter no. P350/15, IO to FO, 30 Jan 15, FO/371/2479/11837.

[3]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 29 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

[4]Moberly, vol. 1, pp. 163-65.

Although the harassment eased immediately afterwards, the Turks were far from finished with their assaults on Force 'D'. Barrett's men at this time had to concern themselves with three possible avenues of attack: the Euphrates, the Tigris, and toward the Karun. A 23 January intelligence report stated that a 12,000 strong force from Baghdad was dividing to cover each of these three routes.[1] This information was followed a week later by a Russian report that Baghdad was being reinforced from Aleppo in the west and Bitlis in the north.[2] Such reports only served to support the opinions that Cox and Barrow had advanced earlier that further action had to be taken along the rivers. As to Barrow's suggestion of an advance to Nasiriyah, Hardinge opposed it as too dangerous in the face of possible Turkish reinforcement. He noted that such an advance 'would take us directly toward Kerbela and the Holy Places, which might be used by the Turks to excite religious opposition.'[3] Hardinge preferred to await developments.

Cox remained insistent about Amara, however. Politically, Amara in Turkish hands could only hurt the British position. Being within thirty miles of the Persian border, the Turks could easily use it as a base for operations and propaganda. In British hands, Amara could be used as a base to control the Beni Lam tribe, the most influential of the area and a constant threat to both Mohammerah and the oil interests. It would also revive the Basra-Amara-Ahwaz trade route, the maintenance of which would be an economic inducement to the Arabs to remain quiet. Further, it was a promising region to begin the irrigation project

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[1]Tel. no. 1595, Crewe to Hardinge, 23 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

[2]Tel. no. 116, Buchanan to FO, 30 Jan 15, FO/371/2477/11352.

[3]Tel. no. H2705, Hardinge to Crewe, 20 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749/4609.

surveyed by Willcocks prior to the war and recommended to Constantinople by the local Turkish officials.[1] Cox later added that an advance would do much to placate Arabs who were gradually becoming restless, thinking that the British were lacking in determination. Again Hardinge opposed such a move on the grounds of military weakness.[2]

This weakness must have weighed heavily on Hardinge, for on 27 January he informed Crewe that the possible increase in Turkish numbers 'in our view denotes further pressure on General Barrett', so he asked permission to reinforce Barrett with another brigade.[3] Crewe had also received the intelligence reports, so he immediately approved the action. Crewe noted the possibility of an attack on Ahwaz[4] and the oil works, and this reinforcement was to aid in defending them. Cox supported the probability of trouble on the Karun, reporting the following day that local officials could not guarantee the support of area tribes or the protection of the European personnel.[5] Crewe grew increasingly worried about the situation, and suggested an immediate transfer of troops from Basra to Ahwaz, since other troops (the 12th Brigade en route from India) had no chance of arriving in time to forestall a possible uprising.[6] Hardinge opposed this idea also. Basra and Kurna were more important than the oil fields, he thought, and to

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[1]Tel. no. 12-B, Cox to IndGovt, 3 Jan 15, FO/371/2482/14120.
[2]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 20 Jan 15, FO/371/2479/12518.
[3]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 27 Jan 15, HDG/102/2/1061.
[4]Tel. no. 1603, Crewe to Hardinge, 27 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.
[5]Tel. no. 137-B, Cox to IndGovt, 28 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749/4922.
[6]Tel. no. 1607, Crewe to Hardinge, 29 Jan 15, HDG/102/1/1296.

weaken one or the other to protect Ahwaz would threaten his base of operations. Hardinge conceded that Barrett could make the move if he thought it feasible, but it should be his decision, as he was the 'man on the spot' and could gauge local needs where India could not.[1] The position of 'man on the spot' here makes its appearance in making strategy in Mesopotamia. It was a position often to be invoked in the coming year.

Since Crewe had made the point of Force 'D's' extra responsibilities on the Karun, Hardinge saw the opportunity of perhaps gaining some reinforcements from outside India to meet those responsibilities. He asked for the return of a division from Egypt. He also wrote privately to Crewe that although the situation was not critical, an extra brigade would be helpful. He reiterated that Ahwaz was not important enough a possession to be protected. To show how little weight the Viceroy gave to the oil interests in Persia, Hardinge wrote that the troops were too few in number 'to allow them to be dissipated in small parties to protect British interests at points which are not vital to us.'[2] Crewe appealed to the War Office for more troops. The India Office asked for eight battalions of Territorials, which could finish their training in India while on garrison duty, thus freeing trained troops for service overseas.[3] The controversy over British military aid to India would continue for quite some time, but meanwhile the Secretary of State and Viceroy had reached the conclusion that the 12th

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[1]Tel. no. 107, Hardinge to Crewe, 30 Jan 15, HDG/102/2/1079.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Crewe, 30 Jan 15, CRW/C/24.

[3]Letter no. 1610, Barrow to WO, 30 Jan 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

Brigade alone would be insufficient to meet Mesopotamian needs and reinforcements to two full divisions should be instituted.[1] With this decision, Hardinge's objections to advances on the Tigris and Euphrates were dropped, and Hardinge decided that he should go to Mesopotamia himself to discuss future plans and settle administrative details.[2]

Hardinge's ten-day trip to Mesopotamia resulted in a marked change in his attitude towards operations there. Whereas prior to this trip he advocated holding the Shatt-al-Arab area and going no further, his outlook thereafter became one of expansion. Hardinge inspected the outposts at Kurna and Shaiba, and perhaps the intense sniping and harassment he experienced persuaded him that Force 'D' was far from secure. He told the Mesopotamia Commission later that while in the field he decided to support Barrow's proposal for a move to Nasiriyah, which he realised would instigate further advances elsewhere.[3] In order to expand the hold on southern Mesopotamia, however, Barrett would require more troops, which were in short supply. As the month of February progressed and the threat of impending Turkish attack grew, a great debate raged between India and London over the question of who would provide the reinforcements.

It was not a new question. As early as 27 November Duff had told Hardinge that 'short of abandoning India altogether, we have done everything possible to help in both France and Egypt and must now confine our efforts to replacing wastage as best we can--and even that is far from easy.'[4] With an eye to possible trouble on the Northwest

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[1]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 31 Jan 15, HDG/102/2/1079a.

[2]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 28 Dec 14, CRW/I/20/1.

[3]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16437.

[4]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 27 Nov 14, HDG/102/1/982a.

Frontier, Duff recommended that India 'must close down the liberal help we have hitherto given freely to the Empire.'[1] Thus, Hardinge had to try elsewhere to get his troops. While in Mesopotamia, he telegraphed to Crewe for help from Britain but, although Crewe agreed that Force 'D' needed to be strengthened, he could not get any help from the War Office.[2] Crewe's main concern was defence, however, and the worsening situation on the Karun inspired his support of the expansion. He asked Hardinge to provide the manpower from India. The Viceroy replied that the War Office should reconsider, because 'when troops are required to avert a danger which is threatening her security, India has a first claim on the Indian Army.'[3] Hardinge's suggestion was to reinforce at the expense of the East African campaign, a theatre he had opposed from the beginning.

Having reached an impasse, India and the India Office both started casting about elsewhere for troops. Barrow transferred three battalions from China, but their arrival in Mesopotamia would be delayed, so he urged India to send replacements 'on credit', so to speak, to meet the present danger while the troops from China were en route to replace the troops Hardinge sent.[4] The India Office also went to the Admiralty for troops. After explaining the situation, Crewe enquired 'whether considering the important naval interests involved at Abadan and in the Gulf generally, the Lords of the Admiralty are disposed to send one or more battalions of Marines.'[5] Since the shipment of 20,000

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[1]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 29 Nov 14, HDG/88/1/443.

[2]Tel. no. 1628, Crewe to Hardinge, 5 Feb 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

[3]Tel. no. H3321, Hardinge to Crewe, 16 Feb 15, HDG/102/2/1142.

[4]Tel. no. 1664, Barrow to Hardinge, 22 Feb 15, IO/L/MIL/5/749.

[5]Letter no. 1672, IO to ADM, 26 Feb 15, IO/L/MIL/5/768.

Marines to East Africa had just been cancelled, surely the force could spare some men to defend Admiralty interests. The Admiralty 'regretted' that none could be made available.

Hardinge stood firm in the face of these refusals. Since India had been so generous at the start of the war, he reasoned, now it was Britain's time to return the favour. In response, Crewe asked him to put together a brigade of Territorials just in case of emergency, to be on hand in case of need.[1] A disturbance near Ahwaz in early March confirmed Crewe's fears and he finally persuaded the Cabinet to permit the increase in Force 'D'. Hardinge was directed on 4 March to send the brigade of Territorials to Mesopotamia immediately, and the resulting deficiency in India would be made good from Egypt or East Africa.[2] Crewe altered this order to a mixed brigade rather than an all-Territorial force. He hoped to allay the Viceroy's fears of decreasing India's defence force by stating that Hardinge and Duff were 'entirely relieved of responsibility for consequences of further reduction of Indian internal defences for this purpose.'[3] He sought to further lessen Hardinge's worries by assuring him of the quick arrival of replacements from Egypt. In spite of these assurances, Hardinge expressed his anger in a private letter to Crewe. He complained that he was being ignored and India was being forgotten. He was shocked that London expected him to send Territorials to fight in Mesopotamia, which 'betrays such an absolute disregard by the Cabinet of the views

[1]Tel. no. 1682, Crewe to Hardinge, 3 Mar 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750.

[2]Tel. no. 1683, Crewe to Hardinge, 4 Mar 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750.

[3]Tel. no. 1689, Crewe to Hardinge, 5 Mar 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750.

of the Govt. of India, and of India's needs, that I really despair not only of the future but also of the present' if London could not even grant a request for a few troops.[1]

Nevertheless, troops left India for the Gulf, and their arrival was timely. The situation in the oil fields had been deteriorating. Although India tried to ignore the Ahwaz front, London could not. Crewe conceded that Basra and Kurna were important, but a defeat at Ahwaz would lay Basra open to a flank attack and ruin any chance of tribal support in the area. As the debate over the troops went on, Barrett was forced to send a detachment north to meet the Turkish threat.[2] There was doubt in London that without a larger commitment to the oil field defence, a Turkish invasion of western Persia might touch off a tribal revolt throughout the frontier area. Barrow told the Foreign Office that Britain 'may have to submit tamely to the annihilation of both our prestige and our material interests in Persian Arabistan.' That, coupled with a Turkish build-up along the Euphrates, 'Turkish intrigue, German gold and fanatical influences may cause the defection of one or more of our leading chiefs.'[3] Barrow suggested the immediate despatch to India of a division from one of the new armies to free trained Indian troops for action.

Barrow's minute painted a gloomy picture, and justifiably so. The Europeans at Ahwaz had evacuated the town and British gunboats had, with tacit Persian permission, steamed up the Karun followed by a

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[1]Letter, Hardinge to Crewe, 9 Mar 15, CRW/C/24.

[2]Tel. no. 1615, Crewe to Hardinge, 1 Feb 15, WO/106/877, p. 16.

[3]Minute by Barrow, 1 Feb 15, FO/371/2482/11975.

regiment of Rajputs. The Sheikh of Mohammerah aided this with a thousand of his own tribesmen 'whom he hopes will be against jehad.'[1] Hardinge, in a long telegram to Crewe on 3 March, echoed Barrow's apprehension; not only was the Karun front troublesome, but the Tigris and Euphrates lines were also being threatened by Turks with the aid of Arab auxiliaries. The Viceroy feared the extent of the Arab movement, and doubted the ability of Barrett's 14,000 men to handle the situation.[2] General Robinson's command of six companies and a few guns on the Karun fought an engagement against a vastly superior force on 3 March 1915 and were forced back with heavy losses.[3] Intelligence reports stated that a large force was also gathering some sixteen miles west of Basra and an 'attack on Basra by this force may be expected at any time.'[4]

Thus, with the situation deteriorating on all sides, the Cabinet decision to strengthen Force 'D' to two divisions was a wise one. Although Crewe privately thought that reports of vast numbers of enemy troops were overrated, he had to bow to superior military authorities who believed in the approaching danger.[5] Nevertheless, he realised that Basra was too important to risk, and he supported the increase of troops for Mesopotamia's defence. Hardinge, as stated earlier, had been looking for troops to expand, rather than merely defend, the hold on lower Mesopotamia, and with the size of Force 'D' enlarged to a

[1]Secret tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 7 Feb 15, WO/106/877, p. 16.

[2]Tel. no. 3517, Hardinge to Grey, 3 Mar 15, FO/371/2482/25893.

[3]Moberly, vol. 1, pp. 183-85.

[4]Tel. no. 382-B, Cox to FO, 4 Mar 15, FO/371/2482/25893.

[5]Letter, Crewe to Hardinge, 12 Mar 15, CRW/C/22.

corps he knew it would soon be time to move. Although present circumstances indicated that the force would do well to hold its own, Hardinge supported the appointment of Lieutenant-General Sir John E. Nixon to command of I.E.F.'D', a general well known for his support for offensive strategy. His arrival and supersession of Barrett in early April 1915 marked a drastic change in the nature of the Mesopotamian operations.

## CHAPTER 3
## THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BASRA VILAYET
## APRIL--OCTOBER 1915

Force 'D' expanded to two divisions and supporting troops when the War Office agreed in early March to despatch the 30th Brigade direct from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. Crewe suggested that as a result of this increase it might be necessary to expand General Barrett's staff to assist in the administration of three brigades, which could be too 'heavy a charge in addition to his other responsibilities.'[1] Barrow stated that the expansion of the staff to corps size was unnecessary considering the distribution of the force. The Indian Government disagreed with Barrow, stating that the existing arrangement 'constituted a grave danger to efficiency',[2] so Force 'D' was organised as an Army Corps. Although Crewe objected that the shortage of 'experienced officers and impossibility of replacing them from England makes it imperative to economise',[3] Hardinge stood firm by Duff's decision to reorganise the force and place it under the direction of a new corps commander. Duff later told the Mesopotamia Commission that appointing General Sir John Nixon was a natural decision, as he had been General Officer Commanding the Southern Army, whose troops made up Force 'D'. He further stated that he thought Nixon to be an excellent

[1]Tel. no. 1700, Crewe to Hardinge, 10 Mar 15, L/MIL/5/750/1700.
[2]Tel. no. H.3743, Hardinge to Crewe, 18 Mar 15, HDG/102/2/1068.
[3]Tel. no. 1725, Crewe to Hardinge, 19 Mar 15, L/MIL/5/750/1725.

field commander.[1]

Barrett's supersession as G.O.C. Force 'D' caused immediate controversy. Crewe later stated that he was surprised by the move and 'felt there was no particular reason for it.'[2] Barrow later testified that he thought the Indian Government was going too far in replacing Barrett, but, since India was technically in charge of the campaign's administration, they were within their rights to appoint Nixon.[3] The news came as a surprise to Barrett, as Hardinge had made no hint of it during his visit to Mesopotamia. He assumed that the Commander-in-Chief had been displeased with his command and, upon hearing of his replacement as G.O.C., resigned his divisional command on medical grounds and left the country within twenty-four hours. Barrett told Cox just before he left that 'he had no reason to think that his conduct of the campaign with limited resources available had failed to satisfy higher authority.'[4] He further believed that he was being sacked for deploying his forces according to political advice rather than by military necessity. That he did so can hardly be denied, but he did it on the orders of the Indian Government or the Secretary of State. Hardinge, in a letter to the G.O.C. Force 'A' in France, stated that Barrett 'has been dissipating their strength by sending driblets to various places'[5] but Barrett's lack of troops and transport necessitated

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[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, nos. 15706-78.

[2]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, no. 3047.

[3]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, nos. 456-70.

[4]Pvt. tel., Cox to Viceroy, 7 Apr 15, HDG/89/1/239a.

[5]Letter, Hardinge to Willcocks (GOC'A'), 20 Mar 15, HDG/93/2/307.

his sending 'driblets' on errands up the Karun and against Arab raiders.

Hardinge's change of attitude after his visit to Mesopotamia is reflected in his support of Nixon's appointment. His original conservatism had changed to an attitude of expansion, even though the India Office's outlook remained unchanged. Crewe admitted that Barrett was 'not as I understand of the dashing school of officer', but since Crewe had a 'general prepossession against advancing, at any rate in a hurry, I felt sorry that the change was made.'[1] He told the Commission that he had originally believed it was done to give Nixon some active campaigning, since the Northern Army G.O.C., Sir James Willcocks, was in France. Crewe knew Nixon's reputation as a 'fighting pushing kind of general. And that did, I confess, make me a little nervous of developments. . . . if the matter had been in the discretion of the India Office the change would not have been made.'[2] Cox felt that Barrett 'was probably better fitted to solve the Mesopotamian military problem than his dashing successor.'[3]

The replacement may have been necessary anyway, as Barrett's medical certificate stated that his resignation was owing to heart palpitations and a severe case of dysentery. The Assistant Director of Medical Services stated he did not think that Barrett's heart could have stood up to the rigours of command in the heat of the Mesopotamian summer.[4] There was never any official complaint about Barrett's command;

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[1]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, no. 3047.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Graves, p. 190.

[4]Tel. no. H4393, Hardinge to Crewe, 23 April 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/8013.

Hardinge knew of no dissatisfaction at military headquarters.[1] The shift of Indian attitude towards the conduct of the campaign immediately following Hardinge's visit, however, points clearly to the change from Barrett, 'with rather less than average initiative or dash',[2] to Nixon, with 'a high reputation as a fighting pushing officer.'

The Secretary of State was officially informed of the arrangement of the II Indian Corps on 1 April; Nixon as Corps Commander, Barrett as 6th Division Commander (until 7 April), Major-General George F. Gorringe as 12th Division Commander, plus the 6th Cavalry Brigade and corps troops.[3] Barrett resigned his post two days before Nixon's arrival, and his place was taken by Major-General C. V. F. Townshend, who arrived in Basra on 23 April. Crewe told Hardinge that the number of additional staff officers seemed large, especially in the light of the expected limitation of movement during the hot weather.[4] Thus, three times, on 10 March, 19 March and 5 April, the India Office berated the Indian Government for forming a corps organisation, yet India paid little or no heed, lending credence to the supposition that they were envisioning a change of policy in Mesopotamia. Privately, however, Crewe's disapproval of India's actions was waning, but not for strategic reasons. He told Barrow that he was 'disposed to give them as much of a free hand with their private war as I can. Otherwise, they will believe that either we or the W.O. are perpetually nagging

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[1]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Cox, 10 Apr 15, HDG/89/2/149a.

[2]Letter, Crewe to Hardinge, 29 Apr 15, CRW/C/22/2.

[3]Tel. no. H.3952, Hardinge to Crewe, 1 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/6772.

[4]Tel. no. 1761, Crewe to Army Dept., IndGovt, 5 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/1761.

them, and relations will become difficult.'[1] Thus, Crewe gave in to save Indian feelings, although he and Barrow repeatedly stated their opposition to the 'need for this Napoleonic staff.'

That India's attitude was changing is further shown by the orders that General Nixon received when he left Simla on 24 March, and the way in which they were issued. Nixon's orders contained four main points: he was to protect the oil works, if such operations did not conflict with the 'main operations'; he was to present plans for occupying the entire Basra Vilayet and a subsequent advance on Baghdad; and he was to respect Persian neutrality 'so far as military and political exigencies permit.' He was further to examine and report on the state of the Cavalry Brigade, the animal and mechanical transport, the possibility of a light railway, aircraft, and river gunboats and transports both available and en route.[2] These orders were given to him by Sir Percy Lake, Chief of the Indian General Staff, on 24 March, but Duff, for reasons of his own, did not send them to London until 7 April, and then they were sent by post, thus delaying their arrival until early May. Therefore, for some six weeks, the India Office had no knowledge of Nixon's orders and assumed that he was still operating under those issued to Barrett, which they had approved.

The orders were much wider in scope than those earlier issued, but that can partially be justified. Since the War Office planners had not fulfilled their pre-war duty to prepare contingency plans for Mesopotamia, and those made by the Indian General Staff covered operations no further up-river than Basra, then it was logical to expect

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[1] Pvt. note, Crewe to Barrow, 4 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750.

[2] Orders, CGSInd to Nixon, in Letter no. H4059, Hardinge to Crewe, 7 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/8109.

some sort of planning to take place, even if only theoretical. Since there was no official information concerning the interior of Mesopotamia, it is natural that Nixon, being on the spot, should prepare plans. Barrow and Duff both pointed this out to the Commission, stating that some arrangements had to be made for eventualities. The basic fault of this reasoning is that the only contingency plans called for were offensive, and this was in direct contradiction to Crewe's policy. To give such orders to a general like Nixon could hardly be justified as mere speculative planning. Nixon himself believed the orders indicated a change in policy. 'I should say that the orders given to me when I was appointed to command were to take the offensive rather than remain on the defensive.'[1]

A common description of Nixon is that he 'revelled in responsibility', whereas Barrett merely 'could take responsibility.'[2] 'General Nixon, not unnaturally, read into the instructions of the Commander-in-Chief an intended change of policy, nor was his staff . . . likely to be able to advise restraint to a commander whose chief characteristics were . . . to accept personal responsibility for every decision.'[3] All comments on the change of command, both at the time and in various histories point out the difference between Nixon and Barrett, and one of the most astute comments on the situation is made by Sir Arnold Wilson, later Mesopotamian Civil Commissioner: '. . . had [Barrett] retained command many things would have been done differently.'[4] The

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11703.

[2]Sir Arnold Wilson, Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914-1917, (Oxford, 1930), p. 33.

[3]Evans, pp. 26-27.

[4]Wilson, p. 34.

major differences would have been that the cautious Barrett would have more closely followed the spirit of the Secretary of State's policy and, even with orders such as those given to Nixon, would have consolidated the area in a much more methodical and, it can be assumed, logistically safe manner. Instead, Force 'D' was led by a man who considered 'military affairs purely from the fighting point of view, leaving administration to arrange itself as economically as it could.'[1] Such an attitude boded ill in a country characterised by its extremely harsh conditions.

Nixon's arrival on 9 April coincided with a Turkish attempt to recapture Basra. The Turks were threatening Force 'D' along the three river lines, and the most important threat to the security of the British position was along the Euphrates to the south and west of Basra. Intelligence reports in early April described the concentration of a Turkish force in this area which was expected to attack within ten days.[2] A force of some 12,000 Turks and 10,000 Arabs, under the command of Suliman Askari, attacked the British position at Shaiba on 12 April. Shaiba had first been occupied in December when Barrett ordered a force there to secure the British left. The position, held by some 7,000 men, was cut off from Basra by the rising waters of the spring floods. The fighting took place over three days, with the Turkish force fighting from poorly prepared positions fronting Barsijiyah Wood, some four miles in front of the Shaiba position. After inconclusive fighting on the first two days, and in extreme heat, Major General Charles Meliss, commanding the 30th Brigade, ordered an attack

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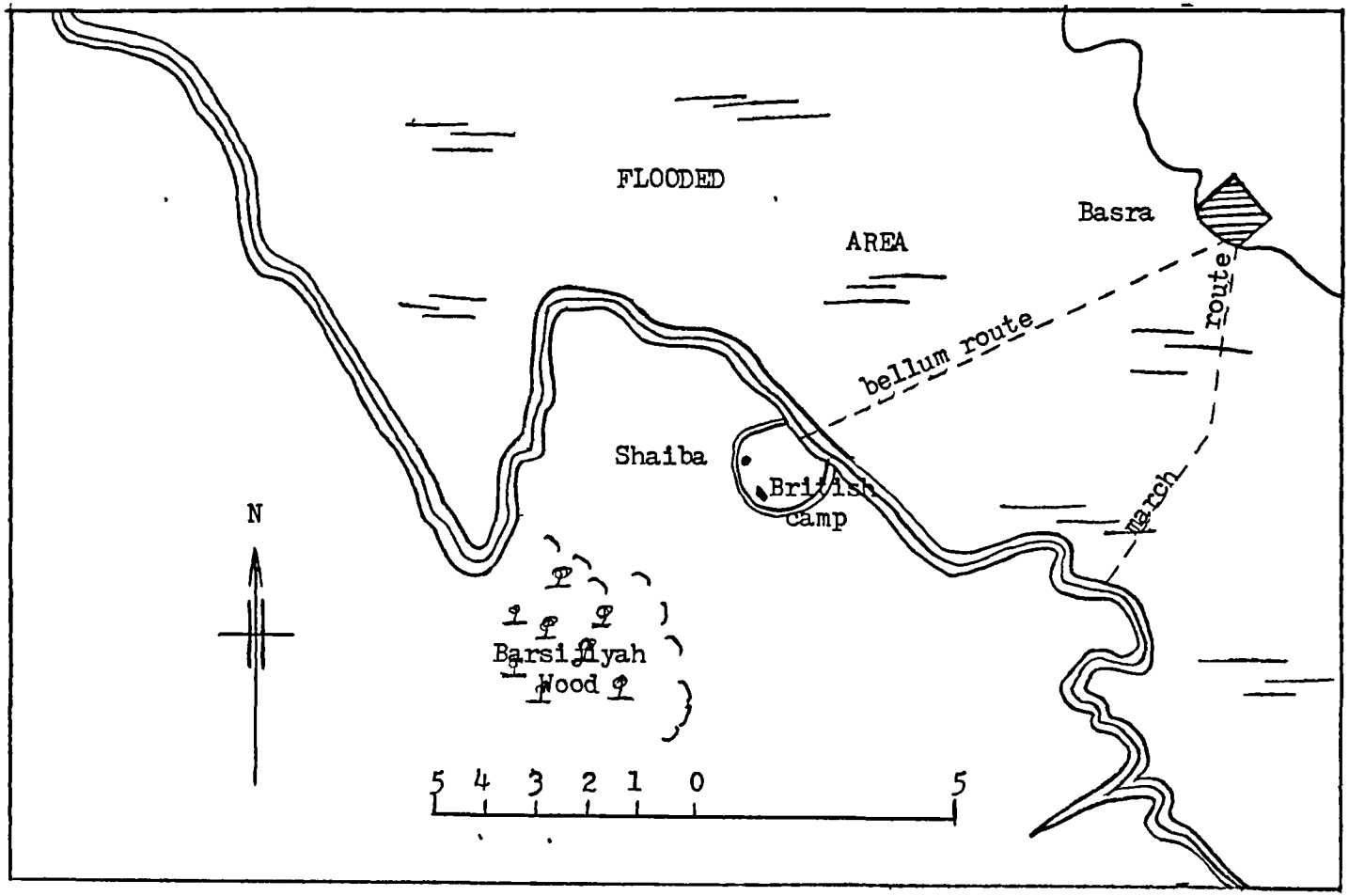
[1] Evans, p. 26.

[2] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Grey, 6 Apr 15, FO/371/2477/40654.

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on the 14th that dislodged the Turks. The cavalry, placed on the right flank near the flooded area, were unable to follow up the victory, but the Arabs previously fighting alongside the Turks changed sides and chased their former allies, with rather more vigour than was absolutely necessary.[1]

The victory was by no means complete. Later analysis of the battle criticised the placing of the cavalry near the water instead of on the open flank where they could usefully fulfil their roles of reconnaissance and pursuit. Reconnaissance was lacking, as aeroplanes had not yet been employed and the mirage was particularly bad at that time. Further, the lack of transport hurt both the supply of the garrison and its ability to pursue the defeated enemy.[2] At a cost of some 1,200 casualties, the British inflicted over 2,400 casualties and captured over 700 men. Although it was not a complete victory, it was by no means an unimportant one. Sir George MacMunn, later Inspector-General of Communications under Maude, wrote: 'Some day, when the Lord of Hosts makes up His jewels, Shaiba will be recognised as one of the decisive battles of the War, if not the world.'[3] In his view, a British defeat there would not only have put the Turks in a flanking position of both Basra and Kurna, it would have inspired the Turkish forces throughout the Ottoman Empire (especially at Gallipoli) and, almost certainly, would have led to a rising of the Arab tribes in southern Mesopotamia against Force 'D', and probably in other areas as well. Whether the British would have been able to maintain their

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[1] Evans, p. 25; Barker, Neglected War, pp. 67-75.

[2] Quetta Staff College, pp. 21-23.

[3] Sir George MacMunn, Behind the Scenes in Many Wars, (London, 1930), p. 212.

position along the Shatt-al-Arab is problematical, but it certainly would have been difficult considering the lack of reinforcement.

Another, and less desirable, outcome of this battle was the effect it must have had on Nixon's attitudes towards the Turkish troops. Even excluding the large number of Arab auxiliaries with the Turkish force, the British garrison was outnumbered, and its defeat of the larger enemy force must have influenced his outlook on their relative fighting abilities. A. J. Barker states that 'this first flush of victory may well have contributed to the underestimation of Turkish fighting capacity that he undoubtedly formed.'[1] This attitude could only have been reinforced by further British victories. From the opposite point of view, he must have taken increasingly for granted the British and Indian soldiers' capacity for fighting under difficult circumstances. He never seemed to give a thought to the extremely trying conditions his troops had to face, more from the country than from the enemy. He consistently ordered his troops to march and fight in conditions of extreme heat, with poor water and food supplies. It is a tribute to the men that they fought so well in the circumstances, but to order men to do so, given the relatively unimportant position of Mesopotamia in grand strategy, can only reflect on the callousness of the commander. Almost nowhere in the command hierarchy was Mesopotamia considered a sufficiently important theatre that such demands on the troops could be justified. Nixon later stated that when he first got to Mesopotamia what bothered him the most 'was that they were very much imbued with this defensive idea.'[2] The fact that this was India Office policy

[1] Barker, Neglected War, p. 76.

[2] Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, no. 10780.

never seemed to occur to him. While it may be true that defence does not win wars, the secondary role of Mesopotamia in the Allied grand strategy dictated at the time the relatively weak forces assigned to it, and their role, made clear by that weakness and official policy, dictated a holding action and not an offensive one.

That Nixon was determined to pursue an offensive course was abetted by the Indian Government. This is shown not only by Duff's orders to Nixon, and the delay in notifying Crewe of those orders, but also by their treatment of orders from London. Crewe notified Hardinge on 19 April that the Admiralty were anxious for the early repair of the pipeline, which had been so damaged by Arab raiders as to cut off oil supply totally from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's fields.[1] Nixon's orders placed the oil works on a subsidiary plane vis-à-vis the operations to control the Basra Vilayet, but Crewe still considered, as did the Admiralty, the defence of the oil works to be of prime importance. The Indian Government passed Crewe's telegram on to Nixon 'with the intimation that he was to use his own discretion',[2] although Crewe's telegram stated clearly that the 'expulsion of Turks from Persian Arabistan [was] politically very desirable.'[3] Barrow told the Commission that the Indian Government looked on the Karun sector as a side-show, but 'that was not the view taken here because the Admiralty, at all events, considered it the most important part of the operations.'[4]

Nixon and Cox had in the meantime decided that the best way to

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[1]Tel. no. 1796, Crewe to Hardinge, 19 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/1796.

[2]Quetta Staff College, p. 25.

[3]Tel. no. 1796, Crewe to Hardinge, 19 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/1796.

[4]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 394.

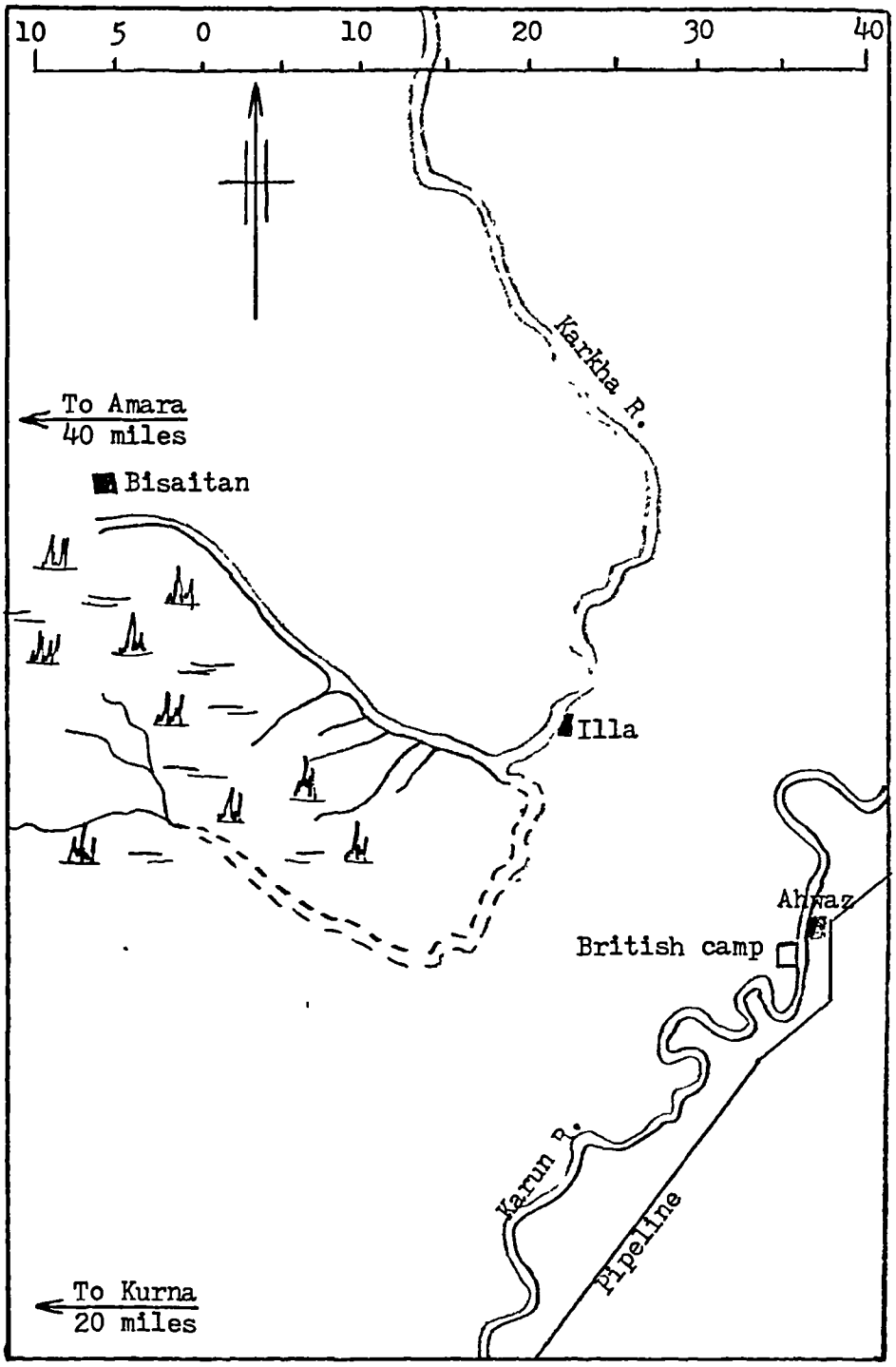
protect the oil fields was to capture Amara on the Tigris, thereby cutting off the lines of communication between Arabistan and Baghdad. To this end, Nixon requested the reinforcement of another cavalry brigade. Crewe refused the request as it suggested an offensive movement, which he had forbidden. On 24 April he sent a telegram that stated his policy perfectly: 'Our present position is strategically a sound one and we cannot at present afford to take risks by extending it unduly. In Mesopotamia a safe game must be played.'[1] Such a message confused Nixon, as it contradicted his orders from India. When questioned about the conflict, Duff told the Commission that 'no one knows better than General Nixon that if there is a conflict between the two, the Secretary of State's orders prevail.'[2] As it turned out, they prevailed for only a short time, and the 'safe game' was soon over. For the present, however, Nixon postponed his plans for operations on the Tigris to comply with Crewe's directions: 'I assume Nixon can concentrate 10,000 men near Ahwaz by the end of April, for these operations' to consolidate the possession of the oil facilities.[3]

Nixon sent General George Gorringe of the 12th Division and some 9,000 men up the Karun on 22 April. A mixed Turco-Arab force withdrew before them, and the local tribes, impressed by the size of the force and the recent Shaiba victory, were eager to cooperate with the British. The Turks left the Karun for Illa on the Karkha River, some twenty-five miles northwest of Ahwaz. Gorringe's force never brought the Turks to battle, as the extreme heat and lack of water forced restric-

[1]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 492.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15097.

[3]Tel. no. 1796, Crewe to Hardinge, 19 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/5/750/1796.


10 5 0 10 20 30 40
Karkha R.
To Amara
40 miles
Bisaitan
Illa
Ahwaz
British camp
Karun R.
Pipeline
To Kurna
20 miles

ARABISTAN

tions on his movements. The force was further hampered by a lack of accurate maps, although the area had been well surveyed before the war and maps were available in India, Bushire, Mohammerah and Ahwaz, but were classified as 'Confidential' and were therefore not made available to the troops.[1] In mid-May a force was detailed to attack some settlements of the Beni Taruf tribe, who had actively supported the Turks and consistently harassed the troops and the pipeline. Again, the heat restricted operations and the mission was only partially successful. The entire action, however, fulfilled its purpose of securing the area and restoring the services of the pipeline. By 22 May the oil was flowing again.[2] The Admiralty wrote to the India Office the following day urging 'the great importance of keeping the line safeguarded in the future. The interruption has already cost the State a very considerable sum. . . . It is therefore considered of extreme urgency that no other breakdown should be experienced.'[3] The Admiralty wrote in a similar vein again in July, but the threat to the fields had by then disappeared.

While Gorringe was operating near Ahwaz, Nixon was busy planning for a thrust up the Tigris against the Turkish positions outside Kurna. Crewe had stated in his 24 April 'safe game' telegram that 'an advance to Amara with the object of controlling the tribes between there and the Karun River might be supported because it adds to the safety of the pipeline.'[4] Thus, on 10 May Nixon ordered Townshend to draw up plans for an advance, which he completed by the next day. Gorringe was to

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[1]Wilson, pp. 40-41.

[2]Quetta Staff College, p. 26; Barker, Neglected War, pp. 81-83.

[3]Letter no. M03918, ADM to IO, 23 May 15, IO/L/MIL/5/768/M03918.

[4]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 492.

advance west from Ahwaz toward Amara while the 6th Division moved up the Tigris. At this time of year, the land on both sides of the river was a vast shallow lake owing to the spring floods. The water was too deep for the troops to wade through, but too shallow to accommodate steamships. Townshend therefore proposed an advance toward the Turkish positions, on several hills, by way of bellums (shallow native boats). Nixon kept India informed of the proposed operations, but Crewe knew nothing until 23 May, when Hardinge told him that Nixon planned to attack on the 24th. Hardinge explained that no reinforcements were necessary and India did not intend to interfere with Nixon's plans.[1] Naturally, this created some confusion. Crewe was angry, but Barrow pointed out to him that the occupation of Amara did protect the route to Ahwaz, though the advanced position in the light of the forthcoming summer heat might be rather difficult to support. Nevertheless, 'Genl. Nixon has rather forced your hand.' Crewe would have to send a message 'to make the best of it . . . [but] prevent any further rash movement.'[2]

Crewe sanctioned the attack, provided Nixon was convinced that he could hold Amara against Turkish counter-offensives. Believing Nixon to be acting on his own initiative, Crewe pointed out that the request for permission was extremely late: '. . . I hold that he should have submitted his proposal before the last moment. Questions jointly involving political and military policy should under present circumstances only be decided by the Cabinet.'[3] Crewe was irritated at being partially

[1]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Crewe, 23 May 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751/8301.

[2]Pvt. note, Barrow to Crewe, 23 May 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751.

[3]Tel. no. 1857, Crewe to Hardinge, 23 May 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751/1857.

forced into agreeing, but he later held that the advance to Amara was 'a decision on military grounds, and I have always strongly held that a taste for amateur strategy is the most dangerous that a Minister can acquire.'[1] Nixon was surprised at Crewe's response, as he must have assumed that his extended communication with India about the attack had been forwarded to the Secretary of State. He thought 'that the Indian Government was trying to force the hand of the Home Government.'[2] His statement to the Mesopotamia Commission read: '"he note I made at the time was that it looked as if India were trying to lay down a policy behind the back of the Secretary of State and the Cabinet.'[3] Duff answered that Nixon's statement was 'so utterly incorrect that it is really difficult to say it was not knowingly incorrect.'[4] It is not easy to agree with Duff's denial, considering his orders to Nixon and the manner in which the Indian Government seemed to keep Crewe purposely uninformed.

Whatever the truth of the machinations, the advance up the Tigris was authorised, although it did not begin on the 24th as Hardinge had said it would, but a week later. By the time it was mounted, Crewe had been replaced as Secretary of State by Sir Austen Chamberlain (Crewe became Lord President of Council in the coalition Government of May 1915). On 28 May Chamberlain sent a telegram to Hardinge asking for a status report from Nixon and an outline of his plans for the summer months, which he assumed would be spent inactive, starting again

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[1]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16439.

[3]Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, statement.

[4]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15106.

in the autumn.[1] Hardinge replied non-committally, in the hope, presumably, of preventing the London authorities from exercising too much control. The Viceroy stated that once current operations were complete, then Nixon would have time to submit detailed plans for the future. 'We feel that while military operations are actually in progress and in present quite uncertain military situation in Lower Mesopotamia it would be undesirable and even dangerous to tie him down with precise orders which might not fit in with the local situation.'[2] For the time being, Nixon was free to do as he pleased.

Amara, eighty-seven miles up the Tigris from Kurna, was 'a modern town, a good supply centre, and with a very much better climate than Basra, and, moreover, was the centre link between our line of communication and that of the Turk--beyond Amara our transport troubles become greater than those of the Turk.'[3] Amara also covered the route toward Ahwaz and Persia used by agents attempting to raise an Arab revolt.[4] It was hoped that the advance would not only cut the link between Baghdad and Persia, but also impress the Arabs sufficiently to guarantee their passivity in the vicinity of the oil fields. Hardinge believed that if the advance had been made earlier, 'we should have been spared all the recent trouble in Arabistan. The Arabs did not understand why we did not go on, and they regarded it as weakness and therefore joined the Turks.'[5] As with every move thus far, the necessity of maintaining

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[1] Barker, Neglected War, p. 84.

[2] Tel. no. H5264, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 2 Jun 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751/8409.

[3] Buchanan, p. 19.

[4] Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 432.

[5] Letter, Hardinge to Nicolson, 25 May 15, FO/800/378.

prestige with the Arabs is cited. MacMunn wrote that it was 'worthy of note that in every advance the necessity for controlling or placating the tribes in front of us was put forward as a reason, the fact being that one might as well try and control or placate a pack of jackals or hyenas as any Arab tribe.'[1] This statement seems to reflect the attitude of those most familiar with the area, but it was never quite grasped by those who were supposed to be directing strategy.

Nixon's instructions to Townshend on 10 May were 'not only to drive the enemy from his present positions and to capture his guns, but to push him up river and occupy Amara--the operation to be continuous.'[2] The battle outside Kurna was to become one of the most unique in history. The strength of the defending Turks is not recorded, but for four months they had been emplaced on a series of hills on either side of the Tigris. Owing to the spring flooding, these hills had become fortified islands. In order to assault these positions, Townshend had sufficient native bellums to transport the 17th Brigade, with their guns and gunboats in support. The boats were poled along like punts by soldiers with some six weeks' training, so the entire operation was carried out by water-borne troops against entrenched Turks--a none too promising situation. 'Had the Turks stood resolutely to their guns,' Townshend wrote, 'I think we must have suffered a real disaster, such as Pakenham at New Orleans, for example.'[3] Whether because of the surprise of the attack at dawn on 31 May, or because of the strangeness of the method of assault, the Turks put up little fight, and the British

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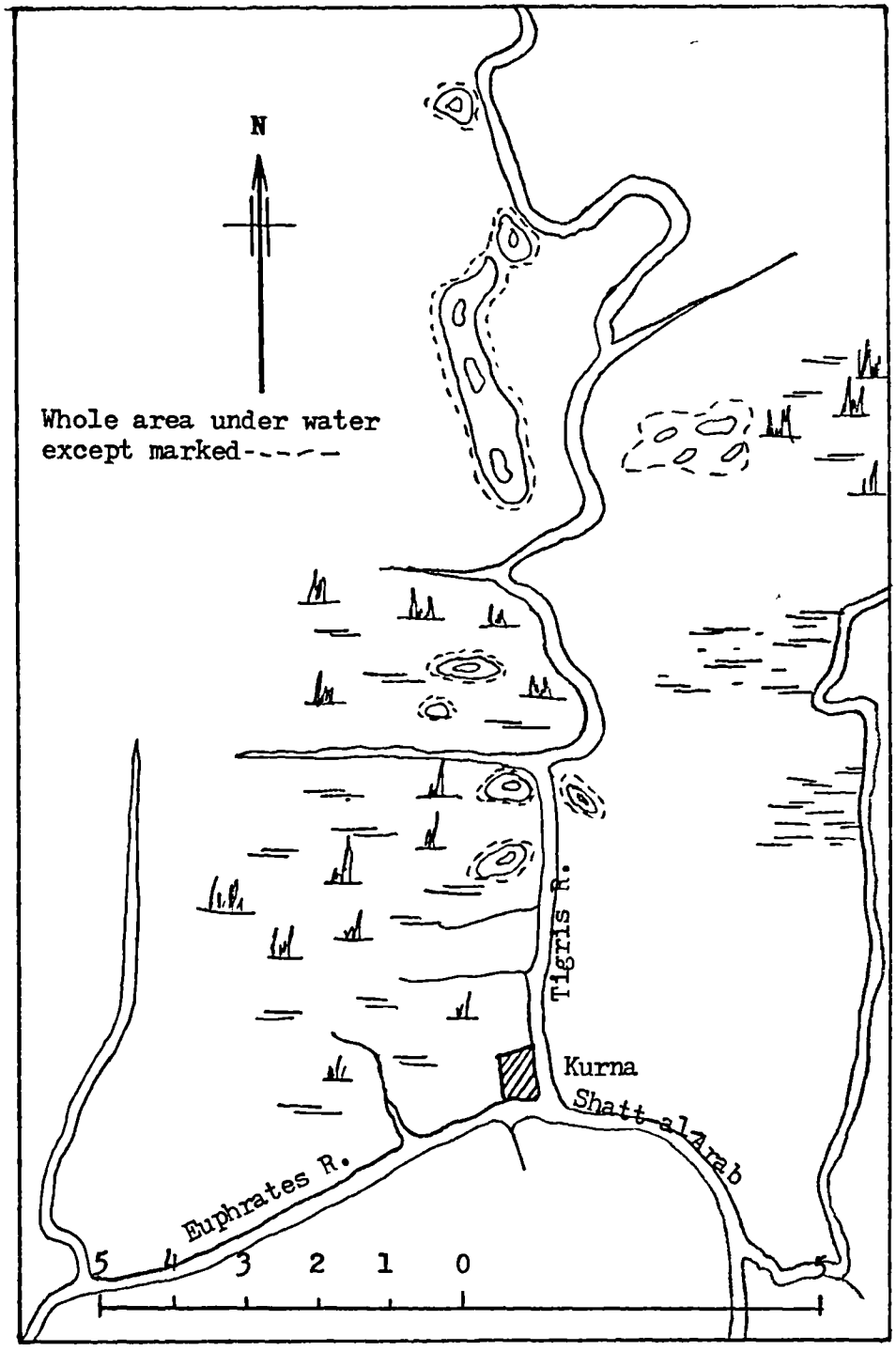
[1]Buchanan, p. 22.

[2]Gen. C.V.F.Townshend, My Campaign in Mesopotamia, (London, 1920), p. 51.

[3]Ibid., p. 62.




OPERATIONS NEAR KURNA--MAY 1915

advanced and captured the Turkish emplacements with relative ease.

As strange as was the assault, the pursuit was stranger still. The assault and occupation of the Turkish positions some ten miles up the Tigris took three days, and by dawn on 3 June only the gunboats were far enough forward to carry on the pursuit. The force of four sloops and a lighter arrived at Amara with a total force of forty-one men and a handful of officers, including both the Senior Naval Officer and Townshend. This miniscule force received the surrender of some 600 soldiers and the town of Amara with its population of 10,000, and held the town from 1330 on the 3rd to 0630 on 4 June. 'Townshend's Regatta' proved to be a masterpiece of planning and execution of an extremely daring operation. The placement of the supporting guns on rafts with the advancing bellums was the key to victory, as their accuracy cleared the Turks from their places and left a fairly easy task for the occupying soldiers. The entire operation cost the British a mere four killed and twenty-one wounded, while inflicting on the Turks 120 killed and wounded and 1,773 prisoners.[1] Townshend wrote that Nixon 'warmly congratulated me on the success of the operation, in which I succeeded without having a butcher-bill.'[2] Nixon's report to Hardinge claimed credit for the victory, and presaged future offensives: 'I was extremely glad to prick the bubble of the Turkish position in front of Kurna, it had become an obsession and the people shook their heads about it and thought it would be very difficult and so on, a lot had been too long sitting down and thinking it impossible.'[3]

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[1]Moberly, vol. 1, pp. 253-65; Townshend, pp. 60-72.

[2]Townshend, p. 72.

[3]Letter, Nixon to Hardinge, 6 Jun 15, HDG/89/1/322a.

Thus Nixon made clear that he had no intention of 'sitting down' and the Amara victory seemed to justify his attitude. 'It was war, and it was magnificent; it came, too, at a welcome moment . . . Small wonder that after these operations the Generals should feel that they could do anything.'[1]

Barrow in London thought differently. Immediately after the victory he wrote that 'it is hoped they will now be able to settle down for the hot season and obtain much needed rest.'[2] He hoped that everything was being done to make the troops comfortable while awaiting the cooler weather. Such was not to be. It appears that the only people who seemed to realise the terrible effects of the hot weather on the fighting men were in London, and their advice on this subject was treated as lightly as were their instructions on policy.

Duff asked Nixon immediately after the Amara victory to define the limits of the Basra Vilayet and his plans to occupy it. Nixon was rather surprised at the first request, since he had assumed that when his orders were issued to secure the Vilayet the Indian Staff knew where it was. He replied that the limits of the Vilayet were Amara on the Tigris and Nasiriyah on the Euphrates, and as he now had the one he proposed to secure the other.[3] The capture of Amara gained the temporary loyalty of the local tribes, but to ensure their security, as well as Amara's, it would be necessary in the short term to occupy Kut-al-Amara, and in the long term to promote irrigation and agriculture.[4]

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[1] Wilson, p. 49.

[2] Memo, Barrow to WO, 6 Jun 15, WO/159/4/2a, no. 4a.

[3] Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, nos. 10808-09.

[4] Tel. no. 1225, Nixon to IndGovt, 14 Jun 15, FO/371/2489/81178.

To fulfil his orders Nixon had to defeat the roughly 7,000-strong Turkish force at Nasiriyah.

Immediately after this appreciation, Nixon's hint of an advance on Kut-al-Amara raised the question of Baghdad again. The Indian General Staff submitted an appreciation on 7 June calling for an advance as soon as possible, given the demoralised state of the enemy, the likely effect on the Arabs of Baghdad's capture, the need to occupy 'Baghdad before the Russians arrive anywhere near it', and the improbability of Turkish reinforcements arriving soon enough to garrison the city sufficiently.[1] To achieve the occupation, all that would be needed was three brigades, one each of infantry, cavalry and artillery.[2] The Director of Military Operations stated that the capture of Kut-al-Amara was essential, but if an advance as far as Baghdad was sanctioned by the Cabinet, then the sooner it could be instigated, the better.[3] Rather than initiate these plans immediately, Hardinge supported Nixon's proposal to attack Nasiriyah.

In spite of the increasing heat, and the lack of provision for coping with it, Nixon determined that Nasiriyah should fall to British arms as soon as possible. The permission for this attack was obtained in a somewhat similar manner to that used prior to the Amara campaign: namely, that India informed London what Nixon was going to do and stated their concurrence, and then waited to see if the Secretary of State would overrule them. Hardinge telegraphed to Chamberlain on 13 June that he proposed to let Nixon advance on Nasiriyah to

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[1] Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, memo by Indian General Staff, 7 Jun 15.

[2] Ibid., memo by Indian General Staff, 5 Jun 15.

[3] Ibid., memo by D.M.O., 8 Jun 15.

establish control over the local tribes along the Euphrates,[1] who had been more hostile than those along the Tigris. Duff agreed with the Commission's later assessment 'that the Indian Government . . . clearly originated proposals and expected the Home Government to veto or assent to them.'[2] He claimed first of all that, since India managed the campaign, then it was her business to make the proposals, but he blamed Nixon for initiating 'every forward movement.' Duff further stated that the orders he gave Nixon in March were 'not a direct indication for him to go ahead',[3] but that can hardly be believed.

Nixon answered that he was just obeying orders, of which capturing Nasiriyah was just a part. He stated that the Arabs behind the British lines 'have all the time been favourable to our side as far as I know, but . . . up to Hai from Nasiriyah the tribes were always hostile.'[4] Wilson believed that Nixon's fear of the Arabs in the south was much overstated. 'The nightmare of Ajaimi [the local sheikh] and his thousands of Arabs, acting under Turkish instigation and supported by Turkish troops, operating against us on the Shatt-al-Arab and Lower Tigris, should have been dispelled by our knowledge of the part played by Arabs at [Shaiba] and elsewhere.'[5] Nevertheless, Ajaimi had been causing trouble ever since his looting of Basra in November 1914, and as a result Duff approved Nixon's plans. Conduct of the operations fell to General Gorringe's 12th Division, lately so sorely tried by their

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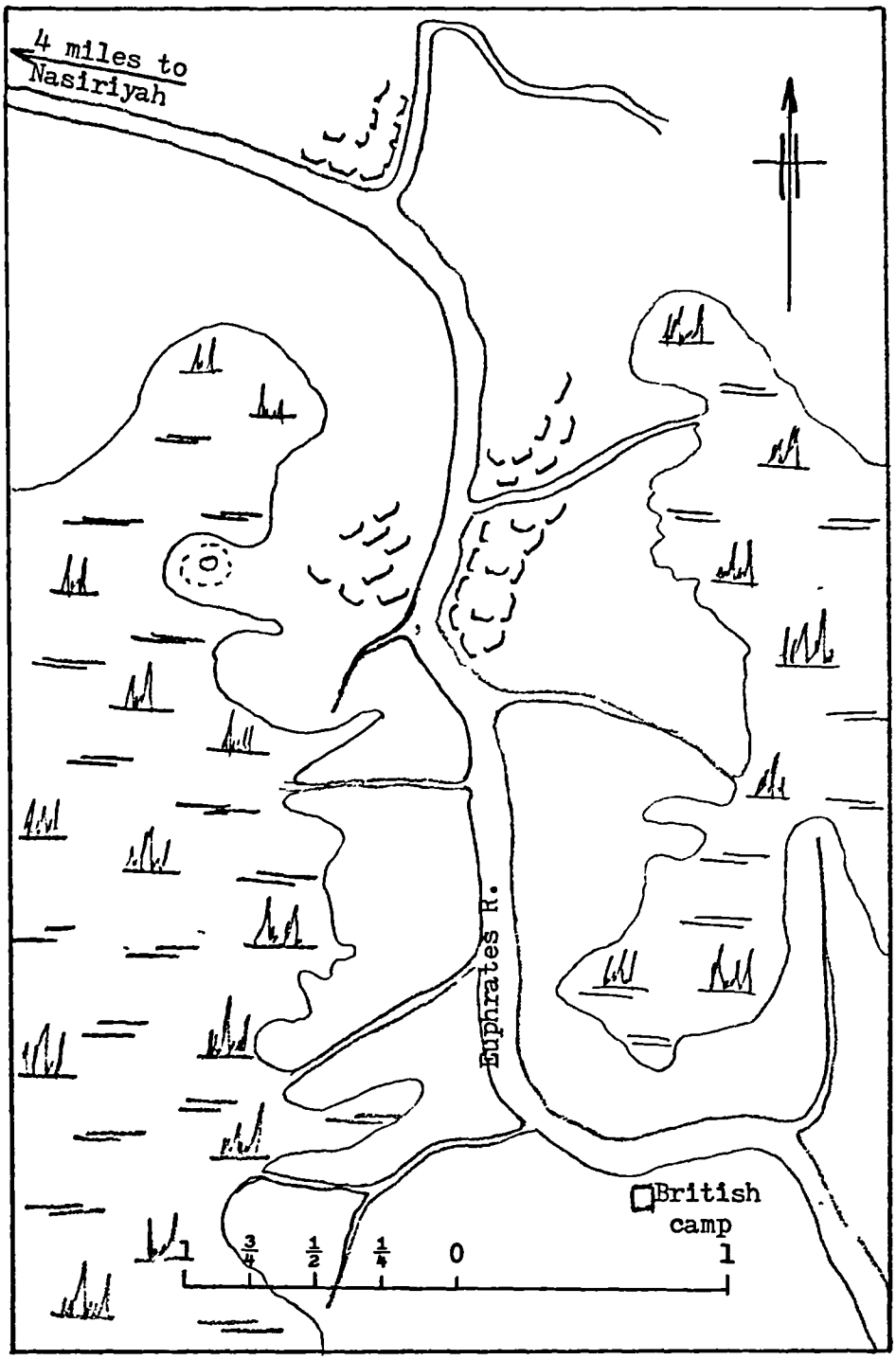
[1] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 13 Jun 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751/8532.

[2] Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, 15133.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, no. 10821.

[5] Wilson, p. 52.




OPERATIONS NEAR NASIRIYAH--JULY 1915

expedition up the Karun and actions via Bisaitan in support of Townshend's attack on Amara. Gorringe arrived back in Basra on 16 June, and he had ten days to assemble his forces and secure as much water transport as possible. It was assumed that the Euphrates and the adjoining Hammar Lake were deep enough to accommodate sufficient shipping, but the lack of craft, and the lake being more of a marsh, led to further privation for Gorringe's troops. The approaches to Nasiriyah were interspersed with small creeks and progress was slow.

This was perhaps the worst of the battles fought in Mesopotamia. It took until 25 July to capture Nasiriyah, and the troops fought the elements as well as the Turks most of the way. 'No animals could be employed: consequently the fighting troops had to do all the handling of stores, guns and ammunition.'[1] The troops had to fight 'creeping forward, yard by yard, from sodden trench to sodden trench, in a shade temperature of 120°--a moist swampy heat--eaten alive with insects.'[2] Losses on both sides in the final engagement before Nasiriyah were about 500, the Turks losing an additional 1,000 prisoners. The victory attracted Royal attention; the King's message of 28 July said that the 'splendid achievement of General Gorringe's column in spite of many hardships and intense heat fills me with admiration.'[3] All this effort was expended for an objective of dubious value. It was assumed that Nasiriyah covered the southern end of the Shatt-al-Hai, a river connecting the Tigris and Euphrates during the rainy season, but in fact the Hai runs dry some thirty miles north of that town. Further, the

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[1]Quetta Staff College, p. 34.

[2]Evans, p. 33.

[3]Moberly, vol. 1, p. 298.

Muntefik tribe never recognised British authority and continued occasional harassment until the end of the war, although it was more bothersome than dangerous. The town, a fairly modern one, was extremely dirty, and the rising number of sick troops could find little comfort there. Besides the wounded, almost 400 men had been sent to hospital because of sickness during the Nasiriyah campaign, and the number of sick was high in other parts of Mesopotamia. Townshend was invalided to India after the battle at Amara, and he did not return until mid-August. He wrote that 2,400 men were in hospital when he left Amara.[1] Large amounts of supplies, including fresh vegetables and ice, were supposed to be available to the troops, but in actuality there were none, not even in the hospitals.[2]

It is amazing that Duff and Nixon, men of such long experience in Indian and colonial campaigns, could have been so blind to the needs of their army. All the troops had received to ease their burdens were congratulations. The hardships and privations that Nixon, et. al., referred to in their glowing descriptions of the troops' bravery were to a large extent the fault of these same commanders. True, they could not control the heat or humidity from which all suffered, but it was little short of cruelty to force the troops to fight for so long in such conditions without respite. With the stability brought by Gorringe's actions on the Karun in May, the British position was sufficiently secure to be held easily until the cooler weather in the autumn. The Turks had to suffer exactly the same privations with short

[1] Townshend, pp. 84-85.

[2] Barker, Neglected War, pp. 97-98.

supply, so they too would have remained inactive through the hot season, just as they did in the summers of 1916, 1917 and 1918. Not only did the constant expansion weaken the troops, it also weakened the security of the British hold on the area.

By the end of July 1915, Force 'D' was spread over five major positions, from Nasiriyah to Ahwaz, none of which were mutually supportive. This further stretched the already hopelessly inadequate river transport. Buchanan noted that both land and river transport were 'taken away from the main scene of operations on the Tigris and the strength of the main army dissipated by leaving a whole brigade as a permanent garrison at Nasiriyah, supplies for which had to be brought from Basra.'[1] The Indian Government had known of the transport problems since Barrett's arrival on the Shatt-al-Arab in November, yet little was done about it. A few steamers from Egypt, India and Burma had been ordered by the time Nixon took command,[2] but he made no mention of shipping until 24 June, and it was months before they could be built, much less delivered. Nixon cannot have been ignorant of the virtually impossible conditions his troops had to face, and he more than anyone else was in a position to relieve the situation. He nevertheless consistently ordered his men to greater dangers in ever-worsening conditions rather than make his force strong and, hence, as battle-worthy as possible. For one considered to be 'Napoleonic' in his attitudes, he ignored the dictum that an army travels on its stomach.

In spite of the increasingly strained conditions of the troops,

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[1] Buchanan, p. 18.

[2] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

and the means to supply them, Nixon's offensive nature manifested itself almost immediately upon the fall of Nasiriyah. Two days after its capture, Hardinge told the Secretary of State that 'the occupation of Kut-al-Amarah is considered by us to be a strategic necessity.'[1] Kut is situated at the junction of the Shatt-al-Hai and the Tigris, and thus the need to secure it became apparent only after the dubious importance of Nasiriyah's position at the other end of the Hai drew the British to that city. Nasiriyah, required to protect Kurna and Basra from a southern flanking move, was itself in a position to be outflanked by an attack down the Hai, a factor unnoticed or ignored when Nixon planned its capture. The usual arguments about the need for local tribal control and the safeguarding of the route to the oil fields were reiterated. Chamberlain was 'pressed at his most vulnerable points--prestige, Persia, and the oil supply.'[2] All that was needed to accomplish this task was more troops (the 28th Brigade at Aden was nominated), but how these troops were to be maintained was not explained; perhaps Hardinge was totally ignorant of the extreme situation along the lines of communication, which is a possibility owing to Nixon's lack of regard for it.

Although Nixon did send what he termed 'a very strong communication relating to river transport'[3] on 24 June, it does not seem that the gravity of the situation quite registered on him. His troops were getting enough food and ammunition to enable them to keep fighting, and that apparently satisfied Nixon. However, the troops rarely saw

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[1]Tel. no. H6582, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 27 Jul 15, WO/106/877, p.28.

[2]Evans, pp. 35-36.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15180.

the necessary extras so essential to health and morale, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, ice, tobacco, etc. Nixon's telegram of 24 June seems to be little more than a passing reference to the supply trouble rather than a definite realisation of the need for its strengthening. This is most clearly shown in his reaction to queries concerning the transport. Nixon, in the above mentioned telegram, informed India that a problem in going to Kut would be the resulting extension of the lines of communication by 153 miles. Taking into account this observation and the request for more transport, Duff asked Nixon 'if he was convinced that with his troops then available he could hold Kut under all conditions of river, feed and maintain all the troops he might place there, to which he replied that he could.'[1] This indicates that Nixon was not thoroughly familiar with the extent of the problem. However, now that Duff had been advised of the shortage, his complicity in the forthcoming disaster mounted.

None of the shortages or drawbacks were communicated to London in Hardinge's telegram of 27 July, urging an attack on Kut. He told the Commission that Nixon's telegram concerning the shipping 'may have been sent on, but I have nothing to show whether it was sent on in its entirety. I think merely the gist of it was sent.'[2] Even if it was not forwarded, the India Office was not nearly as enthusiastic as was Hardinge about the Kut advance. Barrow believed that 'the reasons given by India for going to Amara were, I think, sound. . . . my own personal

[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 12 Dec 16, no. 15724.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15183.

opinion is that beyond Amara it was risky.'[1] Chamberlain, continuing Crewe's cautious policy, echoed Barrow's doubts. He reiterated the impossibility of reinforcement, and stated that 'a cautious strategy is imposed by us.'[2] However, he recognised Kut's possible strategic importance. The Secretary of State realised that holding Kut would lessen the need for a large garrison at Nasiriyah and enable Nixon to concentrate along the Tigris, although such outposts as Ahwaz and Bushire also had to be maintained.[3] Nixon replied that such a suggestion was practically 'identical with those I submitted in my secret despatch dated June 24th'[4] (the river transport telegram), supporting the supposition that the telegrams London received were not exactly the same as the ones Nixon sent to Simla. On 6 August Chamberlain agreed with Nixon's proposals, based on his assurances that he could concentrate at Kut and maintain sufficient supplies. Chamberlain's only proviso was that he be assured of the distribution of troops on the Karun to protect the oil.[5]

Hardinge assured Chamberlain that the oil works were safely defended. At Ahwaz there were six cavalry squadrons and a horse artillery battery. Nixon refused to allocate any more troops to Persia, suggesting instead that sufficient 'subsidies' would keep the Bakhtiari

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[1]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, nos. 528-29.

[2]Tel. no. 1797, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 30 Jul 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752.

[3]'Towards the end of June India made me responsible for the defence of Bushire, and it seemed to me very much on a par with the situation which would have been created if Lord French in France had been responsible for the defence of Gibraltar against an attack by the Spaniards.' Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[4]Tel. no. H6793, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 5 Aug 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752/10160.

[5]Tel. no. 3002, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 6 Aug 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752.

tribe quiet, and such an agreement should be concluded with the Bawi tribe to the west. Furthermore, Nixon thought the presence of too many troops would be an irritant to the tribes and might arouse their hostility, an interesting argument considering that the major section of his army was moving into hostile territory in order to control the local tribes. Hardinge concurred with Nixon's views and reiterated his support of the advance on Kut.[1] On 20 August Chamberlain accepted Nixon's arrangements and gave final permission to advance.[2] Within a few weeks a financial arrangement was made with the Bawi tribe, so Nixon's rear was covered.[3] Nixon could now ignore Persia; in his opinion, the best way to keep things quiet there was to move against the enemy elsewhere..

Townshend's return from India on 21 August was well-timed, as Nixon immediately ordered him to prepare plans for the attack. At this time the question of the ultimate goal of the engagement was discussed. On 10 August, while still in Simla, Townshend had spoken to Duff about this. He assured the Commander-in-Chief that he could defeat the troops under the Turkish commander, Nur-ed-Din, lately Turkish Chief of Police for the Basra Vilayet,[4] but he did not want to go any further up-river with his present force. Townshend told Duff of 'the grave risks of

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[1]Tel. no. H7094, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 18 Aug 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752/10281.

[2]Tel. no. 3020, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 20 Aug 15, WO/106/877, p. 30.

[3]Moberly, vol. 1, p. 308; 'The subsidies to the Bawi tribe were, however, never paid, as Sir Percy Cox, who had not been consulted when they were proposed, pointed out that they would weaken the Shaikh of Mohammerah's authority, and would serve no useful purpose now that the Turkish menace was disposed of.'--Wilson, p. 80.

[4]Barker, Neglected War, p. 106.

continuing the strategic offensive with inadequate forces and with no troops on the Line of Communication.' Duff agreed with this, and stated 'Not one inch, Townshend, shall you go beyond Kut-al-Amara unless I make you up to adequate strength.'[1] With this directive, Townshend met Nixon at Basra on 25 August, but he told Nixon that, given the opportunity, he would chase the Turks to Baghdad on his own authority. 'My official instructions [from Nixon] were clearly to destroy and disperse Nureddin's force and to occupy Kut-al-Amara. But in order to destroy a force, one must pursue.'[2] This difference in interpretation of orders, on the one hand to secure the objective, on the other to defeat the enemy, will be the pivotal factor in the ensuing discussion on the advance to Baghdad.

Townshend held conflicting attitudes on the Mesopotamian campaign. Firstly, he was a field commander and, as such, had a duty to his superiors to act in that capacity to the best of his ability. In his role of 6th Division commander, he concentrated all his aims on the tasks before him. Privately, his views on grand strategy contradicted those he was ordered to implement. In letters to Lord Curzon, Lord Privy Seal and previous Viceroy in India, Townshend argued vehemently against all the 'side shows.' A Napoleonic student to the core, Townshend quoted his dicta frequently, both in his letters and orders, and in his views on strategy and tactics. 'The principal offensive field is France, Flanders and our principal mass should be in that field. In

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[1] Townshend, p. 86.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

my eyes nothing can justify an expedition to the Dardanelles--certainly no political reason. For history is here to prove how fatal it is to let politics enter the field.'[1] He thought the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and the East African campaigns unnecessary; each area should be held by a minimum force while everything else went to France, including himself. Townshend thought himself stuck in a backwater and longed to be in the major theatre. He wrote after Kut that he hoped Kitchener would notice his achievements, apparently wishing for a transfer to France after proving his worth.[2]

In order to prove that worth, Townshend had to win, and he tackled the problem of Kut with all his energies, knowing it would be difficult to repeat his brilliant success at Amara. As with the Amara operation, Townshend had complete control over planning and execution, Nixon contributing nothing but his approval. It would take all his ability to triumph at Kut, since Nur-ed-Din had developed 'the strongest fortified position I have ever seen, 12 miles of works astride the Tigris'[3] located some eight miles down-stream from Kut at Es Sinn. Nur-ed-Din commanded three divisions of some 9,000 regulars and 5,000 Arabs, plus twenty-four guns. He placed them in a strongly entrenched position anchored on the right by the Tigris and on the left and centre by marshes. A further section of trenches extended into the desert from the right bank (facing down-stream) of the river. To assault this position, Townshend had some 3,100 British and 8,000 Indian troops. He proposed

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[1]Letter, Townshend to Curzon, 4 Sep 15, IO/EUR.MSS./F112.163.

[2]Letter, Townshend to Curzon, 7 Nov 15, IO/EUR.MSS./F112.163.

[3]Ibid.

a holding attack on the centre while a mobile force, after a night march, moved around the northern marsh and rolled up the Turkish left flank. The move was difficult, considering the necessary speed of the march, the movement at night with virtually no distinguishing landmarks, and the distance from the water supply of the Tigris.

Townshend wrote later of other difficulties he had to face. First was Nixon's inability to grant him any more transport, of which he commented that it became difficult 'to exaggerate the danger. . . . It was the old story of making bricks without straw.'[1] The medical arrangements were expected to be strained, owing to the difficulty of the objective and the extreme heat, anywhere from 110° to 120° during the daylight hours. The wounded were expected to suffer accordingly, and his justification of this is a fitting comment on the advisability of the entire campaign: '. . . if you tried to provide for your sick and wounded during a desert campaign as you did in the North of France, it would have been impossible to have moved the expedition beyond Basra and Kurna.'[2] He detailed the shortcomings of his force: too few troops, no reinforcements, unsteady supply, lack of transport, and long lines of communication. The 6th Division had 330 transport carts plus 740 animals, eleven steamers and twenty-three barges and lighters. A week after the authorisation of the advance, the force was short of 450 pack mules, 150 carts and 300 draught mules. 'When operations started, the force was 300 mules short of what was required. . . . there were no water carts, and no arrangements could be made for carrying additional

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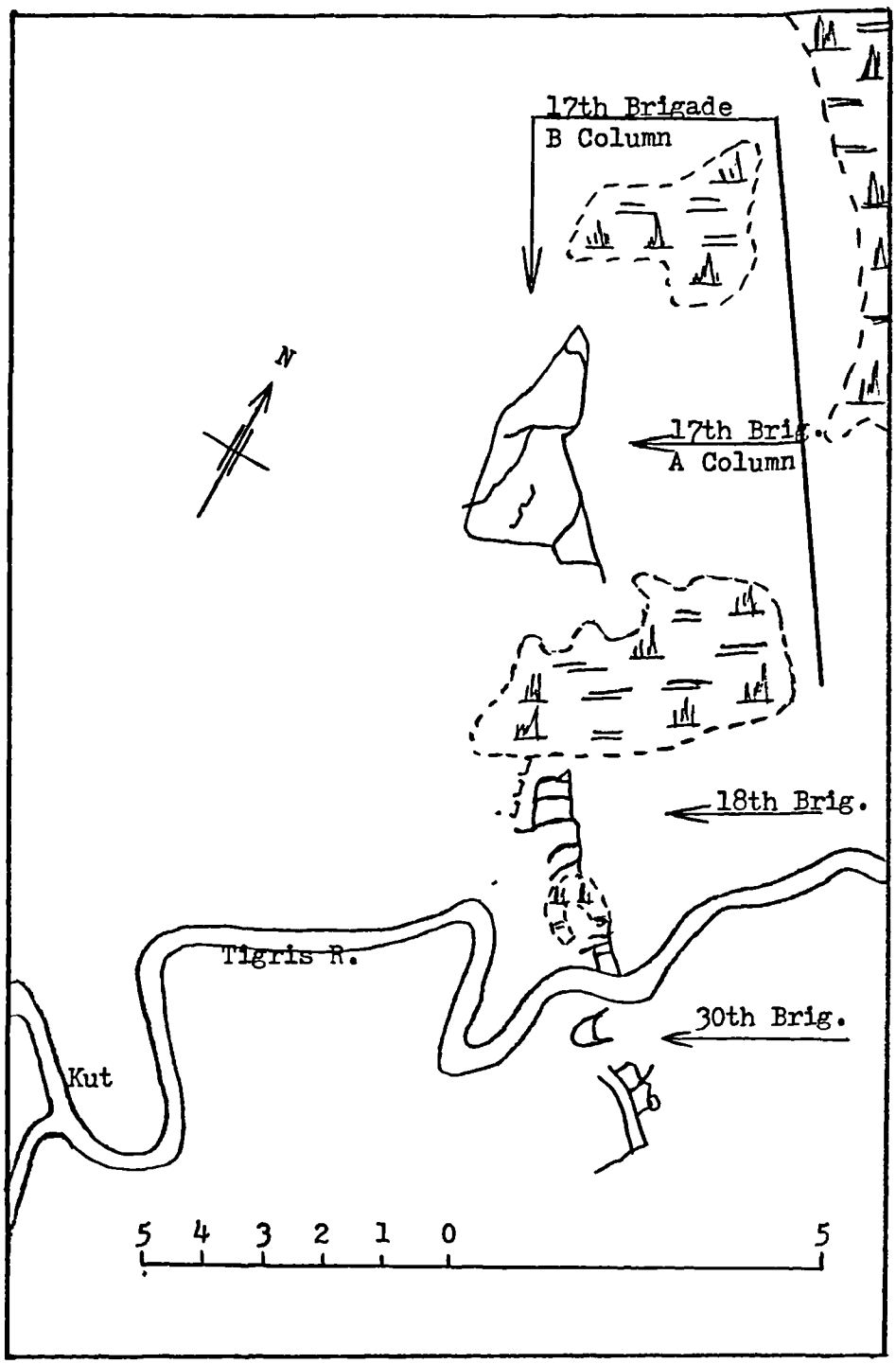
[1] Townshend, p. 99.

[2] Ibid.




KUT-AL-AMARA--26-28 SEPTEMBER 1915

drinking water.'[1] The six-month supply cache that Townshend had requested for reserve at Amara was vetoed by Nixon, who quoted regulations that called for only a six-week reserve.[2] As far as morale was concerned, it seemed to be shaky. The extreme heat had taken its toll, but Townshend noted that there were fewer on sick call as the battle neared. On the other hand, the troops had been extremely disappointed that, after ten months of uninterrupted action in the field, no decorations had been awarded and little official notice had been taken of their efforts.[3] Chamberlain said he was doing all he could to oblige,[4] but it would be months yet before such honours appeared. All this goes to show that, physically and morally, Force 'D' was courting disaster if there was no victory soon; as will be seen later, they courted disaster even further because such victory was achieved.

After a month of preparation, the attack started on 26 September. The force encamped within two and a half miles of the Turks, and began their deception to convince the Turks that the major thrust would be along the river. On the 27th, feints were made along the line, and Nur-ed-Din took the bait, reinforcing his position near the river. On the night of the 27th, two brigades under Delamain and Hoghton moved north. Delamain's 16th Brigade positioned themselves for an attack on the Turkish left, while Hoghton's 17th Brigade proceeded further north to skirt the Ataba Marsh and outflank the position. At dawn on the 28th, the Division attacked all along the line, but Hoghton's arrival,

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[1] Quetta Staff College, pp. 39-40.

[2] Barker, Neglected War, p. 106.

[3] Tel no. 27/8/7, Nixon to Hardinge, 19 Sep 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752/10639.

[4] Tel. no. 3062, Chamberlain to Nixon, 21 Sep 15, IO/L/MIL/5/752/3062.

though late, caught the Turks unawares and their position began to crumble. By the end of the day, the northern end of the Turkish line was in British hands, but the stiff resistance to the attack of Fry's 18th Brigade along the river had maintained the Turkish right. Extreme thirst and the onset of darkness prevented any further envelopment, and in the night the Turks abandoned Es Sinn and began their retreat past Kut toward Baghdad.

'The pursuit will be continued by day and night without regard to the exhaustion of men, horses, as long as the enemy's force remain in the field. All pursuing troops must act with greatest boldness and be prepared to accept risks which would not be justified at other times.'[1] Thus read Townshend's orders of 25 September, and on the morning of the 29th the 6th Division began their pursuit 'to destroy and disperse' the Turks. The lack of transport now made itself felt. As the Turks bypassed Kut and made directly for Ctesiphon, outside Baghdad, only the cavalry and gunboats were able to follow them. Kut was occupied by 30 September, and the cavalry caught up with the Turks' rearguard the following day forty miles past Kut, where they were forced to halt owing to lack of supplies. The cavalry found the Turkish withdrawal to be orderly and covered by well-disciplined troops. The choice now had to be made, in light of the fact that they were not chasing mere remnants of the Turkish force, to obey Duff's verbal directive of 'not one inch past Kut' or Nixon's orders to 'destroy and disperse.' One logical conclusion presented itself. 'The maintenance of the force had now become almost impossible; reorganisation of the administrative services was imperative. Therefore, because it could not be maintained, the pursuit

[1] Report by Townshend on the Kut Campaign, 18 Oct 15, App. 3(b), General Instructions, No. 2 in the Case of Victory and Pursuit, 25 Sep 15, WO/158/656.

was abandoned; administration, for the moment, controlled strategy.'[1] The pursuit stopped at Aziziyah, sixty miles past Kut, with Townshend and the 18th Brigade there by 7 October. The Basra Vilayet was in firm British control with the occupation of Kut on 30 September, although the cavalry pursuit had failed to destroy the retreating force. Therefore, unable to smash the Turks, the British should not have reinforced the cavalry at Aziziyah. This exceeded not only London's authorisation, but India's as well, especially as Hardinge ordered the pursuit to be stopped on 5 October. The tactics of chasing the defeated force were pushed past normal effectiveness, and the reinforcement of the cavalry patrols to create an advanced post constituted a grave strategic error as well as insubordination on Nixon's part.

That Force 'D' was pressing its luck is clear in retrospect, but it was also realised by many at the time, including Townshend, who soon made his objections known. Anyone looking at the situation with a dispassionate eye could have seen the same. The problems had been growing increasingly difficult since Shaiba, but apparently success totally obscured weakness. Take first the transport problem. Barrett in November 1914 complained of a lack of river craft. At Shaiba in April 1915, the bulk of the defeated Turkish force was able to escape to Nasiriyah because the British lacked transport to support a pursuit. In the operations around Ahwaz, Gorringe's troops were unable to operate effectively because they lacked the necessary ability to carry sufficient supplies of drinking water. In the advance to Amara, the lack of river shipping forced Townshend to hold Amara and 600 Turkish prisoners

[1] Evans, p. 37.

virtually alone while waiting eighteen hours for the arrival of the main force. The sheer audacity of Townshend enabled him to maintain control there, and this characterised Nixon's attitude toward all operations.

Nixon's belief that élan made up for a lack of logistics was proved again in battle at Nasiriyah, where the water-logged state of the country made animal transport impossible and the lack of river transport was woefully apparent to the troops who had to be stevedores as well as soldiers. In the Kut operation, the lack of water forced the curtailment of the final movements of the flanking force, while the cavalry pursuit was ineffective because of its dependence on water transport to keep it supplied. Owing to climatic conditions, the Tigris was quite low and the river craft had extreme difficulty in traversing the river as it grew ever more meandering in its course. To make matters worse, at each advance in the campaign, the line of supply became increasingly longer but, because the river craft were not correspondingly supplemented, the supply of food, ammunition, extra provisions, etc., was increasingly slow in appearing at the front, when they appeared at all. By river, Kut was 150 miles from Amara, which was some 90 miles from Kurna, which was again 90 miles from Basra, which, to make matters worse still, had unloading facilities so poor that they could hardly be dignified with the description of 'port.' Further, river craft had to be diverted from the main force to Ahwaz and Nasiriyah, thus weakening the offensive even more. Wilson wrote that, with the occupation of Kut, 'no additional river transport was at the time available, or even on order, and the amount of pack transport at our disposal

was wholly inadequate for extended movements by land. Such considerations appear to have weighed very little with General Nixon.'[1]

The aftermath of Kut found Force 'D' in a precarious position. All the indications were that the basis of the British victory was weak. Those few who saw this were unable to influence the course of events. That Nixon could not see the problem is virtually unthinkable, but whether it really registered on him is doubtful. Major-General George Kemball, Nixon's senior general staff officer, investigated the transport situation in June with Nixon's permission, and gave the results in early July in the form of an extensive memorandum.[2] Kemball's report was forwarded to India with a request by Nixon for nine more steamers, eight tugs, forty-three barges, and six launches. This shows clearly that Nixon knew the exact state of his supply line, and yet he kept on recommending offensive operations in spite of the knowledge that they could not be maintained. Apparently, it was a case of 'out of sight, out of mind' once his application to India was made. That India was now fully aware of the problem only increased their responsibility for supporting all Nixon's recommendations, more so because these reports were not passed on to London.

The inability to maintain a proper logistical system was the major, but not the only, problem Force 'D' had to face. The condition of the troops by late September 1915 was an uncertain factor. The 6th Division had been in action since early November 1914 without a break either from fighting or from the front lines. The system of rotating

[1] Wilson, p. 80.

[2] Moberly, vol. 1, p. 340.

troops from the trenches in France on a periodic basis was unknown in Mesopotamia, and the only way to leave the front was via the hospital. The constant expansion and consolidation was worsened by the lack of comforts, both physical and moral. Mail was slow in coming and outgoing mail was heavily censored. The rations were unvarying and rarely supplemented with anything fresh, except what could be bought in the bazaars or foraged from the countryside. And there was, above all, the heat. When in bivouac, the troops worked only in the early morning and late evening, and 'between seven in the morning and six at night just lay and sweated; sleep, with myriads of flies hovering over them, was out of the question.'[1] When fighting, the troops had to endure the scorching heat in the midst of battle, and the lack of water away from the rivers enforced strict rationing which made the heat of battle hotter still. The fact that the men were able to go into battle at all is amazing, but their ability to constantly dislodge the Turks from defensive positions, in many cases well-prepared ones, is little short of miraculous. Perhaps the utter boredom of garrison duty inspired their fighting ability, a battle perhaps being at least a break in the monotony. It was the fact that they could suffer almost beyond belief, yet still defeat the Turks at every turn, that no doubt inspired Nixon and the Indian authorities to take ever-increasing risks.

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[1]Barker, Neglected War, p. 103.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE DECISION TO ADVANCE TO BAGHDAD

## OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1915

The situation immediately following the battle at Kut-al-Amara is indicative of the almost hopeless turmoil in the chain of command that controlled (if that word can be used) the activities of Force 'D'. All the shortcomings of the previous eleven months of campaigning finally drew together to create one of the great disasters of World War I. Nowhere does the conflict of personalities, the lack of communication, the muddle of logistics, and occasional sheer blindness conspire more against success than in the debate on the advance to Baghdad. Although it seems that by this time an attack on the city was a foregone conclusion, no one at the time cared to admit it, even if the repeated references to Baghdad's capture since November 1914 point to its being just a matter of time before the attempt came about. How the decision was reached to permit the advance is a model of bureaucracy at its worst, and the resultant committees, conferences and reports were all devised to give an official façade to the desire, whether emotional or political, to capture the ancient city of the khalifs.

Although by the time of the Mesopotamia Commission hearings there was a general rush to deny any complicity in the shortage of transport, supply, or medical services that turned the operation into a débâcle, the political justification was still strong. Duff held that every

action up to and including Kut-al-Amara was basically defensive.[1] This is borne out to the extent that the control of the Basra Vilayet was necessary for the complete defence of the oil works, as Nixon's orders of 24 March intimated. It would be difficult to justify taking Baghdad as a defensive manoeuvre, other than to argue that it would deny the Turks an advanced base for operations against the British (and such an argument was again made). However, that had been an excuse for capturing Kurna, Nasiriyah, Amara and Kut, and it is probable that it could be used as an excuse for advancing to Samarra, Mosul, and so on. There were myriad reasons and proposals offered in addition.

First, consider the disposition of British troops after Kut. By 3 October Townshend was in Aziziyah, some sixty miles by road from Kut. The pursuit by the cavalry and the 18th Brigade had reached this point when Townshend decided that the Turkish force had retreated beyond his reach and had lodged themselves in the defences at Ctesiphon. He considered the tactical pursuit following the Kut victory as complete, and wanted to return to Kut to consolidate his position, as Duff had directed him to do in August. This was not only Duff's policy, but that of the Indian Government. Hardinge had informed Sir Thomas Holderness, the Under-Secretary of State for India, on 27 August, that, although Kut might prove a good point of departure for a Baghdad advance, 'once we arrive there I trust we shall entrench ourselves securely and await events. We are not strong enough to press on to Baghdad.'[2] To stand at Kut was the stated policy, but the implied policy was to consider

[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15138.

[2]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16619.

moving forward. Nixon's original orders directed him to prepare a contingency plan for such an operation. After the fall of Amara, when Kut was first mentioned as a possible target, the Indian General Staff prepared an appreciation in favour of the advance. On 30 August, a month before the capture of Kut, Nixon's memorandum supported the idea. Thus, the avowed military policy for Mesopotamia was openly subverted in the hope of changing it.

Nixon's appreciation went to General Sir Percy Lake, who added it to his own of 6 June and forwarded them both to Duff on 9 September. The General Staff memorandum made the unsupportable claim that the difficulties of getting to Baghdad that had been listed in response to Cox's November 1914 proposal had since been overcome. 'Then we had but little river transport, the Turks had more; now we are well equipped with river transport, the Turks have little.'[1] The city could be held with a garrison of one brigade and a striking force of one cavalry and four infantry brigades. Nixon's appreciation pointed out the importance of Baghdad as a supply depot, and echoed the Staff point that any Turkish transport, either overland or by river, not only had to travel difficult routes but had further to go without intervening stops before it came within striking distance of Force 'D', thus safeguarding the British position once the city was captured.[2] Hardinge also began to voice his private opinions on the subject. He wrote to Sir Arthur Nicolson at the Foreign Office 'that if we are unable, for a long time to come, to force the Dardanelles, it becomes a question whether we should

[1]Memo, Lake to Duff, 9 Sep 15, WO/106/893.

[2]Memo, in tel. no. 308-110-0, Nixon to Lake, 30 Aug 15, WO/106/893.

not strike a blow somewhere, and we could do this quite easily by taking Baghdad.'[1] Thus, even before Kut was captured, many were taking its fall for granted.

So, when Kut was captured, those who had thus far favoured expansion (Hardinge, Duff, and Nixon) were prepared to keep moving up-river with hardly a pause. Not everyone, however, shared their enthusiasm. The most important of the disbelievers at this time was Townshend. Although many times blamed for initiating the Baghdad advance, this is an accusation which cannot be supported. Both privately and publicly he spoke against such a move. Although not present to give testimony to the Mesopotamia Commission, Townshend's aide-de-camp, Major H. V. Bastow, did speak on his behalf, and he related that Townshend repeatedly spoke of Duff's directive not to go past Kut. Bastow claimed that Townshend did not even want to go past Amara, but that if ordered to go to Kut 'that was the furthest possible limit he considered safe to advance, considering the smallness of the force and the great dearth of artillery, ships, and land transport.'[2] Thus, when he realised at Aziziyah that it was impossible to catch the Turks, he was prepared to return to Kut. Nixon thought otherwise. He informed Lake on 2 October: 'In my opinion a pursuit even though it has been slow owing to circumstances which could not be avoided, will have a demoralising effect on the Turks and a corresponding good effect on the political situation in this portion of Asia.'[3] This was an opinion he developed without

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[1]Letter, Hardinge to Nicolson, 23 Sep 15, FO/800/379.

[2]Meso Comm, Maj. H.V.Bastow, 30 Jan 17, statement.

[3]Ibid., no. 21332.

consulting Townshend, who did not agree with it.

Townshend noted in his diary that Nixon did 'not seem to realise the weakness and danger of his line of communications. . . . Thus I felt it my duty to give my opinion plainly to the Army Commander whether he likes it or not.'[1] Therefore, on 3 October, he sent to Nixon in Kut his appreciation of the situation, not only from the military position as field commander, but from his physical position with the advanced force. He had already complained to Nixon's Chief of Staff, Kemball, that he wanted no more reinforcements coming into Aziziyah. 'I do not want you to send these troops up here because I do not approve of holding on at Aziziyah. . . . If we are not to go beyond Kut we ought to come back; we are too far ahead.'[2] His 3 October telegram created much controversy during the Commission hearings. Townshend first described the improved condition of the Turks' morale and the strong position in which they were entrenched at Ctesiphon.

> My opinion, if I may be allowed to express one, is that up to the battle of Kut, our objective has been to occupy strategical position of Kut, and to consolidate ourselves in the Vilayet.
>
> Ctesiphon is now held by the defeated Turkish Forces. Should it not be considered politically advisable by Government to occupy Baghdad at present on account of doubtful situation at Dardanelles and possibility of our small forces being driven out of Baghdad by stronger forces from Anatolia which would compel us to retire down a long line of communications teeming with Arabs, at present more or less hostile, whose hostility would become active on hearing of our retreat, then I consider that on military grounds that we should consolidate our position at Kut. The sudden fall of water, which made our advance difficult, slow, and toilsome, upset our plans of entering Baghdad on the heels of the Turks while

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[1]Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, no. 21333.

[2]Meso Comm, Kemball, 4 Jan 17, no. 17458.

> they were retreating in disorder. If on the other hand it is the desire of Government to occupy Baghdad, then, unless great risk is to be run, it is, in my opinion, absolutely necessary that the advance from Kut should be carried out methodically by two Divisions or one Army Corps or by one Division closely supported by another complete Division, exclusive of the garrisons of the important places of Nasiriyah, Ahwaz, and Amara. It is now quite impossible for laden ships to go up.[1]

Bastow stated that Kemball had confirmed receipt of the telegram,[2] and Kemball said he was sure Nixon must have seen it. Nixon, however, claimed he could not remember ever seeing the telegram. 'If he says that he sent it in, I suppose that he did. . . . Personally I have no recollection of that appreciation, and I am not at all sure that it arrived. I never saw it.'[3] Apparently, no one else any further up the chain of command saw it either. Even if they had seen it, the Commission learned they would have ignored it, in India at least. Duff stated that such a communication would carry no weight at all in his opinion. 'I never take the opinion of a junior officer in a case of that sort who had no more responsibility than a lance-corporal. I would as soon go to the officer commanding a battalion.'[4] The fact that Townshend was second-in-command in Mesopotamia and the man who alone drew up and implemented all offensive plans along the Tigris, the man who had de facto control in the field, meant absolutely nothing to Duff. Hardinge later told Chamberlain that he 'did not think it was incumbent on General Nixon to regard or forward opinions by subordinate commanders

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[1] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 9 Apr 16, IO/L/MIL/5/768.

[2] Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, no. 21337.

[3] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 10830.

[4] Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15343.

with which he was not in agreement. We were deliberately and rightly guided by Nixon's opinion alone, as he alone was responsible to us for results.'[1] Thus, Townshend's opinion was lost in the mass of communications which Corps Headquarters received every day. One of the key appraisals of the real situation was never seen in London, by those who finally had to decide whether to permit the advance. Barrow told the Commission that if Townshend's views had been known in London it would most certainly have affected their decision.[2]

They were not known in London, however, because Nixon stated that he did not know of Townshend's objections. On that same day, 3 October, Nixon wired to India that he thought the Turks sufficiently demoralised and disorganised to justify a rapid advance to Ctesiphon in order to finish them off. With this in mind, he planned on concentrating at Aziziyah. He made this claim in ignorance of Townshend's appraisal and without initiating a request to Townshend for information, thus making a judgement on the capabilities of his force based on pure speculation. Townshend never again mentioned his doubts, mainly because of Kemball's reply to his telegram. Kemball answered that Nixon 'understands another Division will be sent here from France.'[3] Townshend responded that he did not know, when writing his report, that reinforcements would be available 'and that makes all the difference in my appreciation.'[4] Townshend stated in his memoirs, however, that that statement was made in a sense of resignation to the situation. He knew that even if a division

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[1]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 6 Apr 16, IO/L/MIL/5/768.

[2]Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 685.

[3]Tel. no. 308/191/0, Kemball to Townshend, 30ct 15, Meso Comm, App. XLIII.

[4]Tel. no. 1286, Townshend to Kemball, 3 Oct 15, Meso Comm, App. LXIII.

was despatched from France, it could not possibly arrive before Turkish reinforcements. 'It seemed to me useless to try to argue any longer. . . . When [Nixon] saw that by warning him I had doubts of success, I am of the opinion that he should have taken command himself and used me under him in the battle.'[1] Further, Townshend had salved his conscience and fulfilled what he considered to be his moral duty by submitting the report in the first place. If Nixon did not see fit to accept his warnings, that was his prerogative, and Townshend could then function in his role as second-in-command without second thoughts. He wrote in his memoirs:

> My duty was to warn my superior; and having done so, I was ready to carry out any order given to me. . . . Herein lies the great distinction between military and civil subordinate situations. If, in a civil office, the subordinate differs materially from his superior, he ought to resign; but in military or naval appointments it is the duty of the subordinate commander to assist his superior in the manner in which that superior may deem his services most advantageous. That is the principle on which I acted in this affair, and on which I should act on a future occasion, if necessary.[2]

When the Mesopotamia Commission held their proceedings, one of their main functions was to discuss who initiated the plan for an advance past Kut to Baghdad. Townshend cannot be blamed because, even though he drove his pursuing troops sixty miles past Kut, it was strictly a tactical operation. He had every intention of returning to Kut if he could not catch the Turks. This withdrawal was overridden by Nixon, and it seems that most of the blame must be placed on him. Duff must shoulder some responsibility owing to the orders he issued wherein he directed Nixon in March to submit a plan for an advance to Baghdad.

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[1] Townshend, p. 130.

[2] Ibid., p. 127.

Although Duff pointed out that that was merely a contingency plan, Duff drafted them on his own, and Nixon believed them to be a statement of policy. He agreed with the Commission's analysis that the order to submit such a plan was 'something more than a hint to a general that he was rather expected to get to Baghdad if he could.'[1] As Field Marshall Sir W. R. Robertson observed later, 'These instructions it will be seen went very far beyond anything which had yet received the sanction of either the Indian or the Home Government.'[2]

Nixon was convinced that a policy change had been instituted. 'It must be presumed that the matter had been discussed between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy before the instructions given me were approved by the Commander-in-Chief, as the policy entailed in their performance was entirely different from that under which my predecessor was acting.'[3] That the Secretary of State had not been consulted never entered his mind when his orders were issued. Robertson wrote:

> The instructions ought, moreover, as on all occasions when a commander in the field first takes up his duties, to have been drafted, or at any rate approved, by the Government. Instead of that they were issued without being referred either to the Viceroy or to the India Office, who were therefore in ignorance of what General Nixon had been told to do.[4]

However, the Secretary of State's telegrams to Nixon prior to the Kurna-Amara operation (berating him for not submitting his plans earlier) and the continual references to defensive policy to protect the oil supply should have, and to an extent did, register on him that there was a

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11746.

[2]Sir W.R.Robertson, Soldiers and Statesmen, 2 vols., (London, 1926), vol. 2, p. 30.

[3]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[4]Robertson, vol. 2, p. 31.

discrepancy. Although the divergence of views was never cleared up, Nixon continued to operate on his orders of 24 March, no matter how much London complained. It can, of course, be argued that at any time Crewe or Chamberlain could have ordered a halt, but they, as politicians, acceded to the military opinions from India and Mesopotamia that the advances were necessary. The India Office was guilty of the sin of omission, in that the officials there accepted almost blindly India's analyses and continually shifted their policy attitudes to accommodate these military desires. At India's door must the sins of commission lie. The original directives came from there. Although Nixon was a willing follower, he was partially justified in his claim that he was only doing what he was told.

Thus, in order to fulfil what he thought to be his orders, Nixon sent his 3 October telegram to India claiming his ability to open the road to Baghdad and his intention of doing so. Although Nixon stated that he had no intention of initiating policy, his decision to concentrate at Aziziyah rather than at Kut, where Duff told Townshend to stay, changed the situation entirely. Nixon must have assumed that the order to advance on Baghdad would come or he could not have justified his decision to reinforce Aziziyah. Indeed, Kemball told Townshend on 3 October that 'it is the Army Commander's intention to open the way to Baghdad',[1] yet Nixon told the Commission that 'until the 8th I had no glimmer as to what policy might be required after a successful battle while we were in pursuit.'[2] This statement can hardly be believed in

[1]Tel. no. 308/191/0, Kemball to Townshend, 3 Oct 15, Meso Comm, App. XLIII.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 10830.

the light of his actions and his admission that he believed his orders directed him to advance. His telegram of the 3rd to India was forwarded to London, where its arrival 'forced the authorities in England to consider immediately the question of an advance.'[1]

The notion of moving on Baghdad was not unexpected in London. Other than the occasional references to it since the inception of the campaign, Sir Edmund Barrow submitted a minute to Chamberlain on 4 October, before Nixon's telegram arrived from India. His analysis of the pressure that would be brought to bear on the British Government to sanction such an advance was amazingly accurate. He foresaw the requests that would come from Nixon and Cox, as well as from the press and from commercial interests. He knew that political pressure would be great and that many of the reasons given would have merit. However, he wrote that 'it is with extreme reluctance that I advocate a policy of caution, which will certainly be unpopular, and perhaps difficult to justify in the minds of those who are not intimate with the intricacies of the problem.'[2] Barrow pointed out the present weakness of Force 'D' and the deterioration of the situation if Baghdad was captured. The thin spread of forces would be just too weak to maintain everything they held. If a serious counterattack succeeded in dislodging the force from Baghdad, the entire theatre could collapse owing to inferior forces and the hostility of the Arabs. Further, the approaching winter would force the Russians in the Caucasus into inactivity and free Turkish forces there to join those on the Tigris.

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[1]Moberly, vol. 2, p. 7.

[2]Minute, Barrow to Chamberlain, 4 Oct 15, WO/106/877.

in India.

With the appreciations of the Indian General Staff in June, and of Nixon on 30 August, Lake was able to frame an outline of the reasons why Baghdad should be attacked, and this he submitted to Duff on 5 October. The possession of Baghdad would (1) deprive the Turks of their main point of concentration; (2) place the British in a defensive position able to defeat in detail Turkish forces sent down either the Tigris or Euphrates; (3) deprive the Turks of steamers and materials of war; (4)increase prestige; (5) interfere with enemy operations in Persia and Afghanistan; and (6) keep the Arabs quiet.[1] All that was needed was an Indian division returned from France. The arguments were familiar ones. No reasons were cited here that had not been used time and again in the past eleven months, and, as always, more men were needed than could be supplied from India. Now, with the prize of Baghdad almost within their grasp, the Indian authorities looked far afield for troops. . . .

Duff proposed that Hardinge request London to ask the Japanese Government to send two divisions of infantry. Duff thought that such troops could be obtained if the Japanese were offered sufficient compensation, either in money or territory. With two extra divisions under his command, Nixon could take Baghdad with one and cover the Germans in Persia with the other,[2] although it seems wasteful to employ an entire division to isolate a comparative handful of agents. This idea was not followed up because Hardinge did not have the money to

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[1]Memo, Lake to Duff, 5 Oct 15, WO/106/893.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15257.

pay the Japanese Government and refused to give up any territory. He decided instead to press for the return of the Indian troops in France. These had not performed too well in the previous winter's cold and their cavalry remained unused. Hardinge wrote that without those men, the Indian Government would not let Townshend past Kut.[1] This became India's main argument: Force 'D' could capture Baghdad immediately but could not hold it without reinforcement.[2] This was based on Nixon's appraisal, which, since Hardinge had no knowledge of Townshend's objections, was accepted as final.

Knowing that on 3 October Nixon claimed he was strong enough to capture Baghdad, the Secretary of State asked on the 8th how many more men he would need to hold the city. Nixon's answer became the basis of all the decisions during the following two weeks. He claimed that he could beat the Turks in front of him and capture Baghdad with his present force, but he should require one division and a cavalry regiment to 'watch both the Tigris and Euphrates line of communications and defeat the enemy as he comes within reach.'[3] This telegram shows the main reason why Nixon must receive the greatest portion of the blame for the disaster that occured in the Baghdad advance. Nixon claimed at the Commission hearings that the request from Chamberlain on 8 October was the first time he realised that a policy change to include the capture of Baghdad might occur. With so important a decision about to be made, it seems only logical that an opinion which would

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[1]Tel. no. H8245, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 6 Oct 15, IO/L/MIL/5/753/10761.

[2]Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 6 Oct 15, CAB/24/1, App. III.

[3]Tel. no. 308/218/0, Nixon to Chamberlain, 8 Oct 15, WO/106/877.

affect that decision ought to be well-considered. Yet Nixon answered Chamberlain immediately, without conferring with any subordinates.

It has already been shown how Townshend viewed the question of an advance; that Nixon would fail to consult him is almost inconceivable. Townshend had commanded all the offensives thus far on the Tigris and had been told to lead the next one (on 3 October Nixon had ordered him to prepare plans for the advance[1]). Since Townshend had to have the most essential information with him in order to prepare those plans, it is only logical that he should best know Force 'D's' needs and abilities. Still, Nixon did not call on him, as both Nixon's Chief of Staff and Townshend's A.D.C. subsequently testified.[2] This was even more important an oversight considering the information Townshend had at his disposal which had come to light since his telegram of objection. Of major importance was the condition of the troops. Delamain reported to Townshend that during the battle of Kut, many of the Indian troops performed without spirit, and those who fought well lost tremendously, one battalion losing forty-five per cent. casualties.[3] His British formations suffered likewise. 'My three British battalions were the backbone of my division. I relied on them for victory--and they were at a strength of less than half a battalion each.'[4] Indian Army battalions at full strength numbered some 850 men, but after Kut, one of them, the 2nd Dorsets, had only 297. By the time they marched on

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[1]Tel. no. 308/191/0, Kemball to Townshend, 3 Oct 15, Meso Comm, App. XLIII.

[2]Meso Comm, Kemball, 4 Jan 17, no. 17457; Bastow, 30 Jan 17, nos. 21345-47.

[3]Townshend, p. 143.

[4]Ibid., p. 144.

Ctesiphon they were only at three-quarter strength, and the drafts were Territorials with little or no training. Townshend commented 'I have never seen such a wretched class of recruits in the whole of my Indian experience, and the battalion commanders did not mince their words on the matter.'[1] Duff told the Commission that by 1 October all the British battalions were overstrength, but this was grossly incorrect. Hardinge expressed amazement at such an 'impossible' statement and said 'we had not received a single draft since the beginning of the war.'[2]

Further, Nixon seemed to overlook other important subordinates in his haste to answer Chamberlain. The Commission observed critically that he apparently failed to consult either his Quartermaster-General or his Surgeon-General. His transport, which had been deteriorating rapidly, was near complete collapse, yet he made no mention of this to Chamberlain. He told the Commission 'If there was one thing that was never out of our minds at any moment it was the question of ships--river transport. It was absolutely impossible in such a case that it should ever escape one's thoughts for a moment.'[3] He repeatedly told the Commission that he was ever mindful of the shipping shortage. In his opening statement he named transport as the main reason for the defeat at Ctesiphon. If he could be as thoroughly conversant with the difficulties as he later claimed to be, why did he not realise that what he was asking of his logistical staff was virtually impossible? But, without consulting anyone, Nixon claimed that he could go on. He

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[1]Townshend, p. 143.

[2]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16512.

[3]Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, no. 10829.

told the Commission 'we had got these troops up there and we were going on fighting. I did not think and I do not think now the risk was any more than it had been the whole time.'[1] The only way that he could have thought such things was because he did not go to the trouble to find out the truth. Sir Percy Lake confirmed this rather bizarre attitude. When asked if the Quartermaster-General was consulted, Lake replied: 'It might have been desirable, but I do not think it would be necessary.'[2]

This attitude reflects one of the most surprising aspects of Nixon's response to Chamberlain. For some inexplicable reason, Nixon, and others in authority, seemed to see the logistical and tactical questions as independent, rather than interdependent entities. When asked why Nixon did not mention the transport difficulties in his 30 August recommendation for the Baghdad advance, he answered that it 'was a purely military appreciation of the advance',[3] as if to suggest that keeping one's troops maintained and mobile was not a military duty. Lake fully supported Nixon's response, believing that the General's word was all that was necessary, not those of his staff.[4] Kemball echoed this reasoning. He stated that Nixon's report dealt with a 'question of policy not of means.' He went on to play down the crucial nature of the situation. 'We assumed that we could find some way and that it was only a matter of time. If we had not the steamers we would have to advance slower.'[5] His comment that Nixon's report was a matter

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[1] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11565.

[2] Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18695.

[3] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11891.

[4] Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18694.

[5] Meso Comm, Kemball, 4 Jan 17, nos. 17402-05.

of policy supports the contention that Nixon was exercising too much responsibility; so, too, does his comment to Townshend that it was the 'Army Commander's intention to open the way to Baghdad' on the very day Townshend spoke against it. This was five days before Chamberlain's request for a resumé of his reinforcement requirements on the 8th, at which time Nixon claimed 'he had no glimmer as to what policy might be required.' It is difficult to reconcile Nixon's actions with the testimony in his defence and his contention that 'in no step was the policy of advancing mine.'[1] His unfounded claim that Force 'D' could handle the Turks was so persuasive, however, that it kept the Government from questioning the extent of the army's true ability.

By taking Nixon's assurances at face value, the policy-makers in London worked on the assumption that everything was in order, with the exception of reinforcements. They could not know of the transport situation, especially as the Indian authorities did not press for more river craft. Hardinge forwarded Nixon's 16 September request for shipping with a note of his own urging that their arrival be expedited.[2] Here, however, the bureaucracy successfully buried the request. The note was addressed to Chamberlain, who passed it on to Barrow, but he was absent from the India Office for a week in late September when the note came through. It was sent to the Department of Stores without his seeing it.[3] Once in the Department of Stores, it was treated as a matter of routine. The Stores section went through all the red tape

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[1] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[2] Tel. no. H8095, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 28 Sep 15, HD/103/2/1471.

[3] Meso Comm, Barrow, 27 Feb 17, no. 22399.

of forms, plans, estimates and contract bidding, and the construction was so delayed that the arrival of these craft in Mesopotamia by late November, when they were needed, was a physical impossibility. Nixon apparently had no idea of the amount of time it would take to fulfil the demand, for on 9 October he wrote to Simla **urgently asking** when the craft would arrive.[1] None of his concern for the craft ever showed itself in any of his despatches regarding the advance, however, and once the earlier requests had been sent on to Stores, the India Office forgot about them. Thus, Holderness was able to tell the Commission that all correspondence concerning the advance that London had received from Nixon and India 'contained no hint of transport being insufficient and had no suggestion that the proposals to capture and occupy Baghdad were conditional on the existing transport being increased.'[2] He therefore made no mention at all of Nixon's earlier requests when he sat on an inter-departmental committee considering the Baghdad advance.

This committee, appointed on 5 October, met on the 7th, 9th and 16th to discuss the basic strategy questions involved in an advance on Baghdad. It was assembled at the direction of the Prime Minister, and contained representatives from the India Office, War Office, Foreign Office and Admiralty. The points under discussion were: (1) whether an attack should be made on Baghdad; (2) the ability to defend the city; (3) could the Turks operate in lower Mesopotamia without possessing Baghdad; (4) the effect Baghdad's capture would have on Turks fighting on other fronts.[3] The committee had reached provisional conclusions

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[1]Meso Comm, Kemball, 4 Jan 17, no. 17385.

[2]Meso Comm, Holderness, 1 Feb 17, statement.

[3]'Precis of Correspondence Regarding the Mesopotamian Expedition: Its Genesis and Development', WO/106/877, pp. 35-36.

on these questions by the end of their session on the 9th, and they passed these on to the Dardanelles Committee on the 11th. They were as follows: first, military and political considerations indicated the desirability of capturing Baghdad, but no attempt should be made without Force 'D' being sufficiently strengthened to maintain itself there. Second, Baghdad was not an ideal defensive position, but the occupation of the surrounding area by a sufficient force would offer strategic advantages. Third, the Turks could operate in lower Mesopotamia without Baghdad in their possession, but their retention of the city would favour their operations. Fourth, the effect of Baghdad's fall on other theatres was impossible to predict, but in order to recapture Baghdad, the Turks would certainly have to weaken themselves on other fronts.[1]

The Dardanelles Committee met on 14 October to consider these conclusions. It was unable to reach definite agreement, so the Admiralty and Imperial General Staffs were directed to prepare a joint appreciation of the question,[2] which they submitted on the 19th. They stated that the operation was feasible, but in order to hold the city Force 'D' would have to be stronger. Further, if Baghdad was occupied, its defence would have to be in the hands of the military, with the prerogative of withdrawing should military considerations so direct, regardless of political considerations.[3] The joint report finished with the opinion that the operation should remain entirely Indian. As for reinforcements, the two staffs emphasised that 'under no circumstances must troops which might otherwise be employed in Europe, be diverted

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[1]Meso Comm, Holderness, 1 Feb 17, statement.

[2]Minutes of the Dardanelles Committee, 14 Oct 15, CAB/42/4/9.

[3]Meso Comm, Chamberlain, 21 Dec 16, nos. 17129-32.

from the primary theatre of war for the purpose of conducting a campaign which cannot appreciably influence the decision as between the armies of the Allied and those of the Central Powers.'[1] This Indian responsibility could be heavy; the Staffs predicted a possible 60,000 Turks concentrating to recapture Baghdad by January 1916.

In India, the Government was considering the responsibility their forces might have to bear. The appreciations dealt with how India could justify the advance; there was no criticism of such a move from any level. Hardinge wrote that the 'capture of Baghdad and the destruction of the Turkish steamers would effectively put an end to Turkish activity in Mesopotamia. . . . It would be a very suitable ending to what has so far been a most satisfactory campaign.'[2] Lake detailed the advantages just as he had done on 5 October. He told the Commission that the Indian authorities believed the Turks could not concentrate too strong an army against Force 'D'. They were already over-committed in Gallipoli, in the Caucasus, and in Syria. 'Our calculation was I think that she could not assemble any very serious forces against us then.'[3] Duff echoed many of Lake's reasons, but added that he could not support operations in the area unless he held Baghdad, and Force 'D' could not defend itself in any position between there and Kut.[4]

The justifications put forward by these men were enough to convince Barrow that Force 'D' could capture the city. He informed Chamberlain on 15 October of his support for the Indian proposals. He

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[1]Report of the General and Admiralty Staffs, 19 Oct 15, WO/106/893.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Nicolson, 14 Oct 15, FO/800/380.

[3]Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18831.

[4]Memo, Duff to Hardinge, 19 Oct 15, HDG/90/1/187.

would drop his objections of 4 October if Force 'D' were brought up to proper strength. A 25,000-man army would be more than able to meet the 60,000 Turks that the General Staff indicated might be assembled by January. He believed this War Office projection to be inflated. If the Gallipoli operations continued, then the Turks could not transfer troops to Mesopotamia. Even if Gallipoli were abandoned, it was doubtful that a large Turkish force could be assembled elsewhere before April. Even if such reinforcement did arrive, 'at the worst we should have to retire to Kut-el-Amara, having first deprived the enemy of many of the advantages Baghdad would ordinarily confer', and it would be some time before the Turks could redevelop Baghdad into a strong supply centre. 'Further, having for all those months interrupted the communications between Baghdad and Persia, we should have emasculated the German movement in Persia and postponed trouble on the Indian frontier.' Barrow considered the risk justified now, and the advantages of going to outweigh the disadvantages of retiring. If forced to retire, it would be well into 1916 and Kut would, by then, have been made into a 'formidable Torres Vedras. . . . In fact I may summarise the policy herein advocated as "frappez fort mais frappez vite."'[1]

With the India Office and India willing to take the risk, the decision finally rested with the Dardanelles Committee, which met on 21 October.[2] The Committee had three alternatives from which to choose. First, Force 'D' could consolidate at Kut and go no further. This was supported by Lord Curzon, because he feared a possible defeat later and

[1]Minute by Barrow, 15 Oct 15, IO/L/MIL/5/769.

[2]Present at the meeting were Asquith, Crewe, Lansdowne, Curzon, Bonar Law, Balfour, Jackson, Kitchener, Murray, Churchill, Selborne, Grey, Lloyd George.

thought the risk of withdrawal outweighed the advantages of advance. Curzon believed any withdrawal from Baghdad would so damage British prestige as to make it impossible to regain her present status. The second alternative was to conduct a raid to destroy Turkish steamers and supplies, followed by a return to Kut. This was favoured by Kitchener and Crewe, because they, too, feared a loss of prestige and thought that a rapid advance and withdrawal would cripple the Turks without harming the British position. Last, there could be an advance followed by a full occupation. This was favoured by Churchill, Balfour and Grey, for the political effects of capturing the city.[1] Kitchener argued forcefully for his point of view. He thought a raid had everything to gain and nothing to lose. It would not require reinforcement, it would cripple Turkish logistics, and it would not hurt prestige if the withdrawal was immediate and voluntary, demonstrating clearly that there was no intention of occupying the city permanently.[2] Bonar Law observed that this was basically in accordance with the recommendations of the General and Admiralty Staffs. He remarked that 'the main consideration seemed to him that we wanted a victory now badly and as cheaply as possible, but that we should have to take some risks in order to gain a success.'[3] He therefore chose the occupation alternative.

Churchill followed this by saying that considerations other than Baghdad had to be taken into account, such as how the action would be viewed elsewhere in the Middle East. Grey stated that the Arab world

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[1]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, nos. 3217-32.

[2]Ibid., no. 3073.

[3]Minutes of the Dardanelles Committee meeting, 21 Oct 15, CAB/42/4/15.

as a whole was on the verge of choosing whether to support the Allies or the Central Powers, and that if Baghdad were taken it would tip the scales in the Allies' favour, since Baghdad would be the first major enemy city to fall to Allied arms. Churchill conjectured that if the city was not taken, then Persia would join Turkey. At this, Curzon observed that such a move by Persia would force Nixon to weaken his forces at Baghdad in order to protect the oil supply. This surprised Balfour and Churchill. Since the inception of the campaign, the India Office had defended this area at Admiralty request, and it had figured prominently in the decisions made concerning advances along the Tigris. Now, Balfour told Chamberlain that the oil fields were not vital, and Churchill added that 'so far as he knew no oil was actually being drawn from Persia. The Navy had other sources of supply.'[1] This was hardly in keeping with the official pleas from the Admiralty throughout the spring and summer to keep the oil flowing.

A point not raised in the discussions of the Dardanelles Committee, but surely in the minds of the members, concerned the secret agreement being negotiated at the time between Russia, France and Britain. Russia had stated that in return for possession of Constantinople, she would support British and French claims for territory in the Middle East. In an inter-departmental conference held in June 1915, it was decided that Britain should claim Baghdad in order to protect the trade outlet at Basra. That such a decision had been made and was in the process of becoming Allied policy could hardly have been forgotten by

[1]Minutes of Dardanelles Committee meeting, 21 Oct 15, CAB/42/4/15.

those on the Committee, all of whom had representatives at the conference.[1]

In opposition to all the advantages that would accrue from capturing Baghdad, there were two main problems to be faced. First, the Turks might possibly assemble as many as 60,000 men to counterattack within three months. Second, Force 'D' was understrength to meet such an offensive. On the available evidence, the Committee could hardly decide other than to advance, and also to withdraw the two Indian divisions in France for use on the Tigris. This move easily met the possible disadvantage of a large enemy force gathering in Mesopotamia. For them to have decided otherwise would have been foolish. How could they know that the evidence was incomplete? Hardinge and Duff passed on Nixon's shipping requests and then forgot them. In London, the requests went to the Department of Stores and the decision-makers remained ignorant of them, Since no one else mentioned any difficulties to them, the Committee made the wisest possible choice, not realising that the military authorities in Mesopotamia and India could be so mistaken. As Chamberlain stated, 'the Government at home took every step they could to see that this was a sound military operation before they ordered it.'[2] However, as Lord Hugh Cecil, a member of the Mesopotamia Commission, summed up, 'there was this great drawback in coming to a wise decision: the Home Government, the War Council with their expert advisors, the Indian Government with their expert advisors, and General

[1]See De Bunsen Committee minutes, CAB/27/1; also Z.A.B.Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War, (London, 1971), et. al.

[2]Meso Comm, Chamberlain, 21 Dec 16, no. 17162.

Nixon, and none of the three knew the whole problem.'[1]

When the Commission's Report was released in 1917, the question of the political nature of this decision was much discussed. Chamberlain, in his resignation speech, detailed the efforts of the Cabinet to ensure military feasibility. Asquith also made this point. 'I would say at once, in the clearest and most explicit terms, that I cannot recall any step taken in this War which was more completely warranted by every relevant consideration of policy and strategy, and which was more strongly fortified in advance by an absolute concurrence of expert authority.'[2] Asquith denied that the Baghdad advance was strictly for the purpose of covering up the Dardanelles fiasco. He commented on the charge 'that the Cabinet at that time were anxious for what is called a "political success"--by which is meant political success to restore their wavering fortunes at home--and, therefore, what followed--that they deliberately subordinated military to political considerations. That is a calumny; it is a vile calumny.'[3] That all reasonable precautions were taken militarily, however, does not preclude a political basis for such a decision. Busch comments that 'the most persuasive point . . . was the relatively simple matter of sheer prestige of the capture of Baghdad, comparable only to the fall of Constantinople.'[4] Surely Balfour's statement to the Dardanelles Committee that 'we wanted a victory now badly and as cheaply as possible', which no one denied at the time,

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[1] Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18885.

[2] Parliamentary Debates (Official Report), Fifth Series, (Hansard), vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2361.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Briton Busch, Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921, (Berkeley, 1971), p. 32.

points to the assumption that, as The Times wrote, 'They saw the disaster ahead at Gallipoli, and they clutched at Sir John Nixon's absurdly confident telegram as drowning men clutch at a straw.'[1] A. J. P. Taylor comments that 'the advance was speeded up to atone for the failure at Gallipoli.'[2] Surely the Dardanelles defeat figured in the Cabinet thinking, but one cannot blame the failure to capture Baghdad on that reason.

It is misleading to say that the Dardanelles Committee sanctioned the advance, for it never officially did so. Chamberlain did it on his own authority. On 21 October, when the discussion described above was finished, and with the Committee in general agreement, Chamberlain told Hardinge of the Staff recommendation that a withdrawal on military grounds had to take precedence over political considerations should a Turkish advance make such a move necessary. He then told the Viceroy that the Committee was prepared to order the attack 'unless you consider that the possibility of eventual withdrawal is decisive against the advance.'[3] Hardinge, of course, responded favourably. He admitted the possibility of a large Turkish counteroffensive 'and although the bad effect of a possible withdrawal in the future cannot be ignored, I am confident that the right policy at the present time is to take the risk.'[4] With this response, Chamberlain gave permission, though with reservation. 'Nixon may march on Baghdad if he is satisfied that force

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[1] The Times (London), 27 Jun 17, p. 7.

[2] A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945, (Oxford, 1965), p. 49.

[3] Meso Comm, Chamberlain, 21 Dec 16, no. 17134.

[4] Ibid., no. 17135.

he has available is sufficient for the operation. Reinforcements will take time owing to relief and transport arrangements, but two divisions will be sent as soon as possible.'[1] While a majority of the Committee seemed to approve the advance, no final official decision was made concerning permission to advance or the length of stay in Baghdad once they got there. Chamberlain sent the order by his own choice, and Crewe stated that 'my impression is that he felt justified from the general trend of the discussion at the War Council [Dardanelles Committee], on the 21st October after the Viceroy's telegram, in sending this.'[2] He claimed that at the next meeting, on 25 October, they 'did not allude to Mesopotamia at all.' They only gave tacit permission, but the phrasing of Chamberlain's telegram gave the final decision once again to the 'man on the spot.'

As positive as Nixon was that he could get to Baghdad, he knew that Force 'D' could not stay there unless it was much stronger. Working on the assumption that it would take three months for the Turks to concentrate sufficient forces to attack Baghdad, Nixon thought that he could hold the city with his present force if reinforcements arrived within one month of its capture. The General Staff at the War Office calculated that seven weeks was the minimum time it would take to transfer troops from France. However, they recommended that the two divisions necessary to hold Baghdad should also be there to capture it, to 'meet the possibility of the Turks assembling greater forces at Baghdad than is at present anticipated, and to ensure that sufficient

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[1]Tel. no. 3099, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 23 Oct 15, WO/106/877.

[2]Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, no. 3237; minutes of Dardanelles Committee meeting, 21 Oct 15, CAB/42/4/15.

force will be available to overcome the maximum resistance which it is estimated that the enemy can offer at Baghdad.'[1] The Dardanelles Committee had not yet come to a decision as to whether to despatch the troops from France when this recommendation was made, so the possibility of India having to provide the troops was strong. Chamberlain telegraphed to Hardinge on 12 October that he was trying to get one whole division transferred from France, but Kitchener had not yet received them from General French.[2] Chamberlain had mentioned on the 8th that 'the Cabinet is prepared to send two divisions sooner than lose this opportunity and sooner than run any undue risk in pursuing it.'[3] He therefore asked India to supply a division temporarily.[4]

Duff advised Hardinge to refuse. 'It is clear that the Home Government are very anxious that Baghdad should be taken, and they will send us the required force if we hold out, but they will give us nothing if the least sign of willingness to find reinforcements is shown by us, and we shall have to do it all by ourselves.'[5] Two brigades had been set aside for emergency use, but Duff refused to part with them. Hardinge therefore told Chamberlain that India could not spare any troops. He believed that 'the Indian sponge is squeezed dry and it will be very difficult to find more troops to send anywhere without exposing ourselves to most serious risks. . . . Consequently, the advance

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[1]General Staff report, 12 Oct 15, IO/L/MIL/5/753.

[2]Pvt. tel., Chamberlain to Hardinge, 12 Oct 15, HDG/103/1/1936.

[3]Sir C. Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Sir Austen Chamberlain, K.G., P.C., M.P., (London, 1940), vol. 2, p. 37.

[4]Letter, Chamberlain to McKenna, 1st Lord of Treasury, 10 Oct 15, Balfour Papers, Vol LIV, no. 49736.

[5]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15298.

in Mesopotamia is hanging fire and nobody seems to know quite what to do.'[1] Duff was afraid that with or without reinforcements, events on the Tigris might determine policy before London decided what to do. He thought that the Turkish activity around Zeur might presage an attack and Nixon might have to launch a preventative assault to forestall a Turkish concentration.[2] Hardinge wrote that 'my conviction is that before we know where we are we shall hear of Nixon being in Baghdad.'[3] Townshend refrained from attacking Zeur in force with anything other than a small raiding party (which he conducted against the post in early November), and the Mesopotamian situation remained static while they awaited reinforcements. India's stand had forced the Home Government to order the Indian troops to be sent from France. The two reserve brigades in India, therefore, were not despatched until the emergency for which they were detailed had passed, and they could do nothing to help Townshend. Nixon believed that 'had they arrived in the beginning of November the result would have been other than it was.'[4]

Force 'D' had enemy reinforcements to worry about as well as their own. Throughout late October and November intelligence reports told of contingents of Turkish troops heading for Baghdad from the Caucasus, Smyrna and Constantinople. Nixon, 'finding that certain of these telegrams were not very reliable, pushed them to one side,'[5] because they

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[1]Letter, Hardinge to Roos-Keppel (Chief Commissioner, N.W.Frontier Province), 20 Oct 15, HDG/90/2/244.

[2]Letter no. S-24472, Duff to Hardinge, 17 Oct 15, WO/106/893.

[3]Letter, Hardinge to Roos-Keppel, 20 Oct 15, HDG/90/2/244.

[4]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[5]Meso Comm, Gribbon, 2 Nov 16, no. 10545.

did not support his plans. It was Nixon's practice of choosing which reports to believe that further caused disaster at Ctesiphon. It is unclear when the General Staff estimate of 60,000 Turks reached Nixon, but indications are that he chose not to heed the estimate, even though local sources substantiated those reports delivered to the General Staff. Major W. H. Gribbon, of Nixon's intelligence staff, claimed that he knew the estimate before the sanction to advance was granted. Chamberlain said that he sent the estimate to the Viceroy on 23 October, and Duff believed Nixon had been informed at the same time.[1] Nixon claimed he knew nothing of the estimate until just before the battle of Ctesiphon. All that he had to work with were the regular weekly intelligence reports, and he said that although he knew the Turks were receiving reinforcements he thought he could still defeat them.

Again, this is an estimate of the 6th Division's capabilities based on inadequate information, as Townshend again was not consulted. Indeed, Townshend's intelligence came from Nixon's headquarters only, and he had no access to War Office intelligence unless Nixon's staff made it available to him. Before leaving from Aziziyah for Ctesiphon Townshend queried Nixon's staff about rumours of Turkish reinforcement on a large scale, and he was told that they had also heard the rumours, but they were not officially confirmed.[2] Gribbon's estimate of Turkish strength at Ctesiphon was 13,500 to 23,000, quite a variation, but he told Townshend 13,000.[3] (Townshend's memoirs place the

[1]Meso Comm, Chamberlain, 21 Dec 16, no. 17007.

[2]Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, no. 21483.

[3]Meso Comm, Gribbon, 2 Nov 16, nos. 10462-63.

estimate at 11,000.[1]) Major Bastow related that 'on November 20th or 21st we had a reliable Arab report that another division had just reached Baghdad. General Townshend sent me over to Sir John Nixon that night to ask him about it, and his reply was, "Tell Charles I don't believe a word of it."'[2] Yet once the battle began, a day later, Townshend learned that Nixon's staff did have knowledge of pending Turkish reinforcements. Townshend finally received official notification of the 60,000 estimate on 25 November, but by then the battle was over.[3]

Even without knowledge of Turkish reinforcements, a mere counting up of numbers would have shown that the risk was almost too great to take. Townshend recalled that 'it was my plain and simple duty to carry out the orders of my superior to the best of my ability, although his orders were against my better judgement. . . . All of my study indicated disaster to me.'[4] The Commission presented Nixon and Duff with the relative strengths and asked for their views. The Commission's arithmetic ran thus: of 23,000 British and Indian troops in Mesopotamia, some 17,000 of them were with Townshend and 14,000 of those were fighting troops, leaving some 6,000 to hold the communications across 500 miles of river, plus garrisons at Nasiriyah, Kurna, Amara, Ahwaz and Basra. Duff had an easy answer: 'I think we were entitled to rely on Sir John Nixon's assurance that we had enough',[5] the same answer he

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[1]Townshend, p. 160.

[2]Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, statement.

[3]Ibid., nos. 21423-27.

[4]Townshend, p. 161.

[5]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15332.

had used all along of depending on the 'man on the spot.' Nixon's answer was no less well-worn: 'My orders came to me from India; that is all I can say.'[1] The Commission quite rightly could not understand how Nixon was so optimistic in his assurances. His answer reflects a blind faith, since it had no basis in the realities of the situation of supply and troop strength. He told the Commission that he could get to Baghdad because the Turkish formations at Ctesiphon--the 35th and 38th Divisions--were those he had already defeated at Shaiba, Amara, Nasiriyah and Kut.[2] To have checked on the figures would have destroyed such reasoning. Barrow summed up: '. . . they were all fully convinced that they could beat them and push into Baghdad. I think that none of them had any real doubt on that point.'[3]

Their confidence was entirely misplaced. Only Townshend claims to have had doubts, and after 3 October he kept them to himself. On that date Nixon directed him to start making plans for an advance, but on 10 October Hardinge ordered the 6th Division to stand at Aziziyah until reinforcements arrived. This suited Townshend, but Kemball went to visit him on the 19th and hinted that he might go into action on short notice, because 'we might find the situation, so close to the Turkish force, intolerable and have to attck them',[4] since Nur-ed-Din had placed a cover force at El Kutiniyah, some 12 miles up-river from Aziziyah. Kemball suggested that if Townshend had to engage this force of some 4,000 Turks and Arabs, then he could use that as an excuse to

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11531.

[2]Ibid., no. 11498.

[3]Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 714.

[4]Note in Townshend's diary, 19 Oct 15, Meso Comm, App. LXIII.

press on to Baghdad immediately. Townshend would have none of it. He wrote in his diary that if he did this, then he would get all the blame for disobeying the Viceroy's orders. He might fight the covering force if it became necessary (which it did on the night of 27-28 October) but he would not advance without more men, no matter what suggestions he might receive from Nixon's staff. 'I must get orders to advance, since I am not in command of Force 'D' in Mesopotamia and Sir John Nixon is. I think it is his duty to give such an order and not make me advance on my own and so take all responsibility before the Government for so doing.'[1]

Townshend believed that if he could not return to Kut as he had recommended, then he did not want to advance without the strongest possible force. He had no idea that the two divisions in France were coming, or that Nixon had assured London that the 6th Division could enter Baghdad with its current strength. All he knew was that Nixon expected 'liberal reinforcement', as stated in a telegram on 26 October.[2] On 30 October Kemball again flew to Aziziyah to discuss Townshend's plan of attack, saying that he had 'not been told what troops or what strength are coming from Egypt or India or anywhere',[3] which implies that he knew some were coming, but not how many. Townshend was growing increasingly worried that he might have to move without being at full strength. First he begged Nixon to bring every possible soldier from Basra to fill the ranks.[4] Next, he wrote a private letter to Hardinge

[1] Note in Townshend's diary, 19 Oct 15, Meso Comm, App. LXIII.

[2] Moberly, vol. 2, p. 48.

[3] Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, no. 21361.

[4] Townshend, p. 144.

outlining the Mesopotamian campaign thus far. He stated that Nixon had directed none of the campaigns personally, but had deferred to Townshend at Amara and Kut, and was doing so again at Ctesiphon. Therefore, Townshend argued, he was more likely to know the 6th Division's abilities better than would Nixon. The troops were losing spirit and he did not want to force them to attack Turkish trenches in their present state. Further, some Moslems hesitated to fight at Ctesiphon, since it was the site of the grave of Suliman Pak, one of Mohammed's most devoted servants. 'I am asking Sir John [Nixon] to give some reinforcements into the country--the troops are not confident and have had enough. This is absolutely true, of course, but it would be altered if they would hear that reinforcements were in the country.'[1]

Major-General Maitland Cowper, the Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster-General for Force 'D', told the Commission that the despatch of the two divisions was purposely kept secret. He stated that the news was first announced in bivouac just before the battle. 'I remember Sir John turning to General Kemball and saying, "George, go across to Townshend and tell him about the reinforcements. Make it public now, it will hearten them up."'[2] Cowper claimed the reason for the secrecy was to keep the Turks from finding out about the reinforcements. Nixon thought that if the Turks learned of the arrival of two entire divisions, they would withdraw and not fight for Baghdad, and Nixon wanted to annihilate them. While it is doubtful that the Turks would have withdrawn if they had known of the British troops' arrival, the

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[1]Letter, Townshend to Hardinge, 2 Nov 15, HDG/94/1/159.

[2]Meso Comm, Cowper, 18 Jan 17, no. 19281.

reasoning behind Nixon's action is questionable. The situation was a repeat of that at Kut: which object was more important, the defeat of the enemy or the securing of the objective? Since the capture of Baghdad would have secured for the British a good defensive position, and the Turks could send a possible 60,000 men to attack the city, would the addition of Nur-ed-Din's force, had it withdrawn, have made that much difference, particularly with the garrison defending Baghdad numbering at least two divisions? It was assumed that a British force in Baghdad could defeat in detail any force coming down either river, so if Nixon could get into Baghdad without a fight then his defensive position there would be vastly superior to his offensive position at Ctesiphon. Therefore, Nixon's strategy was grossly defective. More than any other target in Mesopotamia, Baghdad was a political objective, and neither political nor military ends were served by fighting at Ctesiphon. Cowper's statement, and Kemball's suggestions to Townshend in mid-October, show Nixon's attitude in quite a different light from his assertion to the Commission that 'I was not a fire eater ready to go forward at any moment. My point of view was entirely that I should carry out whatever policy was ordered.'[1]

Townshend went into battle against his better judgement. His forces were understrength, and he had inadequate intelligence about his reinforcements and those of the enemy. Kemball claimed that when he visitied Aziziyah on 5 November Townshend was confident and ready to advance. Townshend said in his memoirs that he knew nothing of the 'intense optimism' that was supposed to be prevalent at his headquarters.

[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, no. 10827.

He claimed that all he could do had been done, so he had to put on a confident façade for the sake of the troops,[1] who, as he told Hardinge, 'are tired and their tails are not up, but slightly down.'[2] Nevertheless, the troops had the utmost confidence in Townshend, according to Bastow, and they would go into battle just because he was leading them, but the 6th Division staff knew Townshend's real attitude. Bastow stated that many of the staff realised the entire operation was 'to try a big game of bluff and get them out. We backed Townshend's luck, and our own luck; that was all. . . . We had the utmost confidence in General Townshend; the troops would do what they could not be asked to do by anybody else.'[3]

The 6th Division would be asked to do a lot. The British force that went into action on 22 November numbered 10,212 infantry and 1,080 cavalry, and they faced an extremely difficult task. Nur-ed-Din commanded the 35th, 38th, 45th and 51st Divisions, numbering some 18,000 men, plus a few thousand Arabs.[4] The Turkish position contained fifteen redoubts covered by wire and linked by trenches, all commanding a perfectly flat area of approach. The position was reminiscent of Kut, with the majority of the defenders on the left bank of the Tigris, and Townshend decided to attack them in a repeat version of his Kut operation. He divided the troops into three columns, with a mixed force added to the far right to harass the Turkish rear and carry out the pursuit. The 6th Division went into battle without a reserve. Townshend

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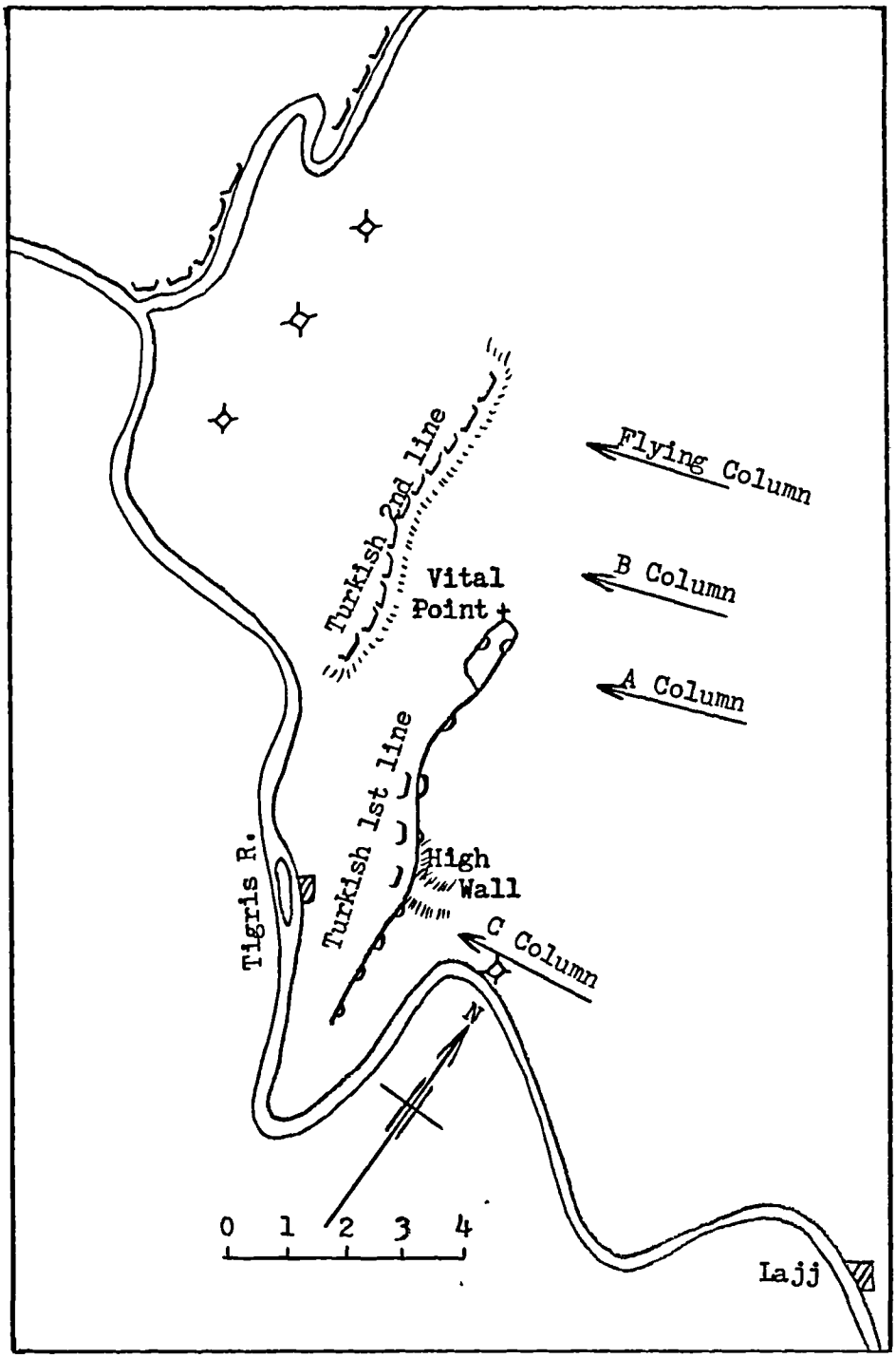
[1] Townshend, pp. 160-61.

[2] Letter, Townshend to Hardinge, 2 Nov 15, HDG/94/1/159.

[3] Meso Comm, Bastow, 30 Jan 17, nos. 21446-48.

[4] Moberly, vol. 2, p. 65.

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hoped to hold the Turks at the river, then draw their reserves to the far left flank by an attack there. When they were committed, he would launch his decisive attack with Delamain's column at the Vital Point, two mounds anchoring the left of the first line of Turkish trenches. The columns took up position late on 21 November after an uneventful four-day march from Aziziyah.

At dawn on the 22nd the attack started and, although early success was achieved, it was clear that the quality of the defending troops was higher than heretofore. The 45th Division was mainly Anatolian, and the troops had a high morale and good discipline. Nevertheless, the British managed to break their hold on the Turkish front lines and force them back to their second line by late afternoon. As night fell, the fighting stopped and the British attempted to secure their gains. The Turkish fire had been deadly, and casualties were far higher than had been expected. Although the entire front line of trenches had been taken, the Turks had not broken and run as they had in the past, so Townshend knew that his rapidly weakening force could do no more now than hold on to what they had captured. On the 23rd, the Turks counter-attacked, half-heartedly in the afternoon but more agressively through the night. The fighting continued on the 24th with the Turks attempting to recapture High Wall, an extended mound 20-25 feet high in the centre of the first line. When they failed and withdrew to the second line, Nur-ed-Din began to consider retreating. The night of 24-25 November saw a series of misconceptions so great that either side, with the merest hint of the true situation, could have taken immediate victory. As the Turkish 51st Division withdrew after a counterattack on

High Wall, Arab scouts thought they were British troops advancing, and reported them as such to Nur-ed-Din. His own force was weakening and he thought that the British must have received reinforcements and were attacking. He ordered a withdrawal towards Baghdad. They left in the night, but the next morning, when no British troops appeared, Nur-ed-Din ordered his men back into the trenches.

As this was taking place, the British were trying to draw themselves together and decide whether they should stay. In the midst of a dust storm, which blew throughout the 24th, they failed to see the Turkish trenches were empty. Thus, when the Turks returned on the morning of the 25th, the British believed them to be fresh Turkish troops. Townshend knew he could not face another day of Turkish attacks and survive, so he ordered the withdrawal to Lajj of the few troops he had remaining. They began to leave the evening of the 25th.[1] As they left, the British believed the battle won, even though Baghdad was not reached and they were abandoning the field. The Staff diary stated 'it now remains to thoroughly reorganise, push forward fresh troops and again resume the offensive when all preparations are complete.'[2] Townshend assumed the Turks to be too weak to follow, and his orders called for a withdrawal only as far as Lajj, 'where I am entrenching and going to make myself comfortable.'[3]

The battle had cost the British dearly. Of the 10,000 infantry, some 4,200 had become casualties. Most of the men had been lost on the

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[1] Barker, Neglected War, pp. 124-34; Evans, pp. 48-51; Wilson, pp. 84-88; Quetta Staff College, pp. 59-63.

[2] Force 'D' General Staff diary, 23 Nov 15, WO/95/4965.

[3] Townshend, p. 187.

first day in capturing the front trenches. The three columns in the attack, each a brigade, numbered only from 700 to 1,000 after the battle. Of 317 British officers, 130 were casualties. Of 235 Indian officers, only 111 remained. The 24th, 104th and 110th Indian regiments had lost more than half their strengths.[1] The wounded had been evacuated to Lajj, where two hospital ships waited, ready to accept 500 men each. The total estimated number of casualties prior to the battle was 1,200 at most. The medical staff were totally unprepared to deal with three to four times the estimated number of casualties, and the wounded were subjected to conditions that made them wish they had remained on the battlefield. It is really rather difficult to blame the medical staff for being so poorly organised. Their casualty estimate was based on the most difficult battle to date, the one at Kut, and the Ctesiphon position and the plan to assault it were so similar to Kut that an equal number of casualties seemed logical. Nixon told the Commission that after Kut the seriously wounded numbered only 800, the other 300 being only slightly wounded.[2] In all, it was not entirely the fault of the medical service that the wounded underwent such suffering. The basic trouble was that they, too, believed that the Turks would be defeated. Then the wounded would only have to be moved twenty miles to hospital in Baghdad, rather than 400 miles, as it turned out to be. Again this can be blamed on the lack of transport.

As difficult as it had been to move the necessary supplies forward to Aziziyah, it was much more difficult to remove the supplies,

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[1]Wilson, p. 86.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, nos. 11799-803.

troops and wounded back down-river. The medical transport was quickly filled, and the wounded were carried off the field in standard transport carts, without springs or padding. Once they arrived at the river, the wounded were then placed on any available ship, one small steamer packing some 600 men aboard.[1] The ships that left Lajj on 25 November did not reach Basra until 4 December, being held up by poor navigation and Arab harassment. During this time the ships' stores ran out of food and purified water. The men on deck suffered exposure from the sun by day, and wind and rain at night. The ships carrying them down-river had carried animals up-river and had not been cleaned before taking on the casualties. The transport problems were worsening consistently since the advance past Kurna, and finally culminated in the horror that the wounded had to undergo here. In spite of all this, the Indian Government received a telegram, with Nixon's name attached, that stated: 'General condition of the wounded very satisfactory. Medical arrangements, under circumstances of considerable difficulty, worked splendidly.'[2] This telegram was transmitted to London and read in the House of Commons. When the truth came to be known, it sparked the public outrage that led to the establishment of the Mesopotamia Commission.[3]

As the wounded tried to make their way down-river, Townshend was having troubles also, and soon he was forced to follow them. Directly after the Ctesiphon battle two officers arrived from Constantinople to

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[1]Evans, p. 50.

[2]Barker, Neglected War, p. 137.

[3]Evans, p. 51.

take charge of the Mesopotamian theatre. One was Khalil Pasha, an energetic young general, and the other was no less than Colmar von der Goltz, who had been in Turkey since 1880, when he had been sent by the German General Staff to reorganise the Turkish Army. These two directed the pursuit and eventual siege of the 6th Division, though von der Goltz did not live to see their surrender. Under their command, the Turkish forces followed hard on Townshend's troops and he had to abandon Lajj and march for Aziziyah, which he reached on 28 November. Townshend stood there for two days to cover the withdrawal of wounded and stores but decided that Kut would better serve his purpose in the face of what he believed to be large Turkish reinforcements. He still thought in terms of the offensive, as did Nixon and the Indian Government, and he viewed both Aziziyah and Kut merely as bases for the next advance. Townshend telegraphed to Kemball that he thought the Turks would not follow him past Zeur, 'so far away from their beloved entrenchments at Ctesiphon. The further we get him from Baghdad the more chance in the next battle of our knocking him out altogether.'[1]

The withdrawal from Lajj to Kut was a perfect military operation. The Turks shadowed Townshend at a distance of some ten miles, but by 30 November had passed Aziziyah and were closing on him. On the night of 30 November-1 December the Turkish advanced guard ran into the British rear. The next morning the Turks attacked the British, camped at Umm al Tabul, but were forced to retreat by well-placed artillery fire and a concentrated counterattack which almost encircled the Turks. This

[1] Townshend, p. 189.

forced their retreat with some 700 casualties, while the 6th Division gained a bit more time, but it weakened the British force by a further 500 men.[1] Meliss' 30th Brigade, having been sent to Kut to clear the way for the rest of the division, returned to act as a rear guard and the British marched to Kut, which they reached on 3 December. Townshend praised his men's endurance in a telegram to Corps Headquarters, stating that his men had operated 'without the loss of a gun or a single prisoner even. Never have I seen a retirement like that of 1st December even on manoeuvres better done as regards suppleness and steadiness in manoeuvres under heavy shell fire.'[2] Townshend entered Kut on the 3rd; by the 8th he was surrounded. Whether he should have stayed there, and why he did so, are questions fraught with controversy. Townshend has received most of the blame for losing the 6th Division at Kut, but as has been shown thus far, the fact that he had to leave Kut two months earlier and embark on an operation sure to bring about his defeat was none of his doing. Nixon's blindness and the resulting ignorance in Simla and London forced Townshend's return to Kut. Nixon and the Indian authorities must bear the responsibility for the division's loss.

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[1]Quetta Staff College, p. 63.

[2]Tel. no. 88G, Townshend to Kemball, 3 Dec 15, Force 'D' General Staff diary, App. 2, WO/95/4965.

# CHAPTER 5

## THE SIEGE OF KUT

## DECEMBER 1915-APRIL 1916

The authorities in London and India believed the early reports claiming victory at Ctesiphon, and they did not, therefore, appreciate until too late the gravity of the events on the Tigris. Chamberlain telegraphed a message to Nixon, via India and Hardinge, expressing his sympathy 'with you and General Townshend in your disappointment which I am confident will only be of a temporary nature.'[1] In an appreciation of the situation on 29 November 1915, Barrow wrote as if the 6th Division was merely regrouping down-river from Ctesiphon. Apparently unaware of the Turks closely following Townshend's withdrawal, Barrow spoke of Kut as 'an extraordinarily strong position . . . that cannot readily be turned. . . . therefore the desirability of preparing a fortified position at Kut-el-Amara suggests itself'[2] as if such a strongpoint might act as a convenient resting place while Nixon prepared to move on to Baghdad later.

It would be some days yet before the authorities learned the realities of Townshend's plight. Although the retreat down the Tigris was a textbook example of how such movements should be conducted, it was a retreat nonetheless, and an exhausting one. Beginning from Lajj on 27 November, the 6th Division reached Aziziyah the next day, where

[1] Tel., no number, Nixon to Townshend, 29 Nov 15, National Army Museum, ref. no. 6012-234.

[2] Memo by Barrow, 29 Nov 15, CAB/42/5/26.

they halted for two days to allow the men to rest and the wounded to be evacuated by the slow-moving steamers, which were hampered by the low level of the river and extensive Arab harassment. The Division left Aziziyah on 30 November for Umm al Tabul, then they marched without stopping until 2 December, when they halted within sight of Kut and ate a hot meal. The troops had marched forty-four miles in thirty-six hours.[1] They entered Kut on 3 December. Townshend's appearance as he entered Kut was described by a gunner of the 5th Hampshire Battery: 'It reminded me of the painting of Napoleon retiring from Moscow I think it was. Change those uniforms to British ones and you have a perfect picture of Townshend and his staff retiring to Kut as one could ever get.'[2]

On the way from Lajj Townshend had been considering the question of staying in Kut or continuing down-river. He wrote later that he had decided to stay there for two reasons: first, to hold up the Turkish advance by covering the river, which they needed for their supply line; and second, to give Nixon time to concentrate sufficient forces for a counteroffensive.[3] His only alternative was to retire further down the Tigris to Es Sinn, the scene of his victory in late September. He decided against such a move, and has been criticised by historians and military analysts ever since. His reasons for not going on were that the Es Sinn defences, while extensive, faced in the wrong direction; they covered a front of six miles on the left bank of the river

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[1] R. Millar, Kut, (London, 1969), pp. 45-55.

[2] Unpublished article on Kut, Maj.-Gen. H.H.Rich, Imperial War Museum, (IWM), box 74/49/1.

[3] Townshend, p. 209.

and three miles on the right, so it was impossible for his force to hold securely a position constructed for three corps; there were no supplies there; and, finally, his men were too tired to march any further.[1]

This last reason has been much criticised. Townshend later wrote, 'Never have I seen anything like the exhaustion of the troops after we reached Kut.'[2] Ronald Miller comments that this statement is not true. 'To the delight of his detractors, and unfortunately for Townshend, in his autobiography . . . he gave the exhausted and sorry state of his troops and their consequent inability to retreat further . . . as one of the main reasons. ... . This was strongly denied by General Delamain',[3] who was of the opinion that the troops could have continued on the march the next day. However, recent interviews with the survivors cast doubt on Millar's claim. In 1972, General H. H. Rich sent a questionnaire to the remaining survivors of the siege and asked them, among other things, to comment on their condition on 3 December and after. Although a few stated that a day's rest and a meal would have been sufficient to enable them to carry on, many disagreed. 'I think that when we reached Kut we were exhausted, not merely tired. We needed at least a week's rest. By then the Turks would be round us. Many of the soldiers, and all of the followers, could have failed to reach Sannaiyat',[4] stated one of the responses. It is quite possible that the withdrawal from Ctesiphon, two-thirds of which was carried out in two and a half days, did in fact result in 'considerable exhaustion of the troops.'[5]

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[1] Townshend, p. 211.

[2] Ibid., p. 212.

[3] Millar, p. 64.

[4] Questionnaire by Capt. Warren Sandes, Rich papers, IWM, 74/49/1.

[5] Quetta Staff College, p. 65.

Russell Braddon, probably Townshend's most serious detractor, questions this decision on yet another ground. If the division was too tired to march away from Kut, 'then how will they almost immediately manage to dig about six miles of trenches and fight off the Turks?'[1] In a 1922 Staff College analysis of the decision, Major (later General) H. L. Ismay, in a well-received paper, noted that remaining in Kut 'entailed extensive digging, further fighting, and that loss of moral (sic) which is inevitable in a besieged force.'[2] All of these criticisms follow the assumption, however, that not only was Kut not worth keeping, but also that there was a more suitable place further down the Tigris to which they could withdraw. Where could Townshend go that was as well-supplied as Kut? No other defensive line contained sufficient stores. Had he abandoned Kut, all those supplies would have fallen into Turkish hands, for they certainly could not have been carried away as all the transport was being used for the wounded.

If Townshend had continued down-river, where could he have gone? As he explained, the trenches at Es Sinn, seven miles further on, were facing in the wrong direction. Townshend wrote 'we could not have remained at Essinn on account of the food question--we would have starved in a week.'[3] Braddon, indeed, answers his own criticism in his diatribe against Townshend: 'And if he were not to stand at Es Sinn, how much farther must he march his exhausted men? To Gharbi? That was 70 river miles. To Amarah? that was 150 miles.'[4] It is doubtful that,

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[1] R. Braddon, The Siege, (London, 1969), pp. 115-16.

[2] Indoor Exercise 'D', Quetta Staff College, 28 Oct 22, Maj. H.L. Ismay, Liddell Hart Archives, King's College, III/2/107.

[3] Townshend, p. 211.

[4] Braddon, pp. 115-16.

even if his men had marched after a day's rest, they could have successfully reached the nearest post at Ali Gharbi, and the defences there were little better than at Kut. True, they were marching toward reinforcements, but the brigade coming up-river was as poorly supplied as was the 6th Division, and they would have to face an immediate Turkish attack with little ammunition or food supplies and virtually no medical facilities. Norman Dixon mentions, for some odd reason, the 'wiser and possible course of retreating to Basra',[1] although he fails to state how Townshend was to move his command 400 miles without transport or supply.

Thus, there seems to be sufficient justification for Townshend's decision to remain at Kut, although he knew that a siege was imminent. Townshend was an avid military historian, and he wrote later

> I knew well the fate which in history is generally reserved for the force which deliberately shuts itself up in an entrenched camp or fortified place. . . . If the relieving army is unable to reach the besieged force, military history offers hardly any examples of the self-deliverance of an army once invested.[2]

Townshend placed his faith in Nixon and the reinforcements he knew were coming into the country. After all, except for the check at Ctesiphon, the Turks had never been able to withstand British arms, so he felt confident that early relief was probable, if not a foregone conclusion. In addition, Townshend had successfully withstood a siege at Chitral on the Northwest Frontier in 1895, so he knew something of siege tactics. Because of this experience it has lately been suggested that

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[1] N.F.Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, (London, 1976), p. 166.

[2] Townshend, p. 211.

Townshend 'had a pathological inclination toward sieges.'[1] Barker, in his biography of Townshend, rightly denies this claim. 'Townshend was too well versed in military strategy to be swayed by emotional considerations and what he seems to have regarded as the most important factor was his superior's promise that reinforcements would reach him in a month.'[2] In spite of all the argument concerning his decision to stay, it will soon be shown that, in any case, the ultimate decision was not Townshend's.

Before reaching Kut, he had requested permission to withdraw past the town if necessary. Nixon's rejection of this idea did not arrive until 4 December, by which time Townshend had decided to remain to rest his troops. The delay in receiving the telegram was due entirely to the 6th Division staff, five members of which handled the telegram before giving it to Townshend. The Divisional cypher officer wrote that Townshend remarked: 'Such staff work I have never encountered hope never to do so again (sic). Now it is too late to retire down the Tigris.'[3] In the first of six proclamations to his troops to be made during the siege, he told them 'I intend to defend Kut El Amara & not retire any further. . . . The honour of our Mother Country & the Empire demands that we all work heart and soul in the defence of this place. We must dig deep and dig in quickly.'[4] On 3 December Townshend informed Nixon 'I mean to defend KUT like I did CHITRAL.'[5] Nixon replied immediately

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[1] Millar, p. 64.

[2] A.J.Barker, Townshend of Kut, (London, 1967), p. 246.

[3] Questionnaire, Lt. W.Snell, Rich papers, IWM, 74/49/1.

[4] Special Order, proclamation to troops of 6th Division, 4 Dec 15, National Army Museum, ref. no. 6012-234.

[5] Tel. no. 88G, Townshend to Nixon, 3 Dec 15, WO/95/4965.

that he fully agreed. There followed a series of telegrams between the two, Townshend offering his reasons for remaining and Nixon promising early relief. The message from Nixon on 5 December, however, began to change Townshend's outlook. Nixon stated that he approved Townshend's actions. 'Every effort is being made to relieve you as soon as possible and it is hoped to do so within two months.'[1] Townshend replied '"within two months" is serious. I hope we can be relieved by a month. My rations for British troops are only one month, and fifty-five days Indian troops.'[2] The next day, 6 December, Townshend reconsidered his position.

> I have carefully considered your statement of relief within two months and am convinced that would mean loss of this Division, for the whole Turkish force of six divisions would develop long before then. It would be best, I think, that I should preserve force by retiring to Ali Gharbi and form covering force for the concentration at Amara. To be relieved within a month would only mean a very anxious and trying time, but two months, I am certain, means loss of the Division. My retirement from here should be arranged as soon as possible. I should save most of ammunition, utilising mahelas and bring away heavy guns. You know shape and size of Kut peninsula I occupy. A large force can enfilade peninsula from all points of the compass and render it an inferno.[3]

This telegram shows that Townshend had no 'pathological inclination' to be surrounded. Kut was not completely encircled until the 8th, and the 6th Division still could have left by way of the left bank of the Tigris, or crossed over the remaining bridge to the right bank. away from the advancing Turks. He knew that this meant abandoning a vast quantity of supplies and a strategic post in favour of the dubious

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[1] Moberly, vol. 2, p. 135.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Tel. no. 160G, Townshend to Kemball, 6 Dec 15, Meso Comm, App. LXIII.

protection of the defences at Ali Gharbi, yet he considered taking his chances in open combat rather than the virtual certainty of ultimate surrender by staying in Kut. In a further telegram, he offered to remain if the relief force could hold Sheikh Saad, a relatively close position.[1] Nixon answered on the evening of the 6th. 'Retirement from Kut would open the Shatt-al-Hai to Turks and have a very bad effect and does not at present seem to be demanded as a military necessity. . . . Taking all these points into consideration Army Commander does not approve your proposal to fall back on Ali-al-Gharbi.'[2] Thus, the onus of responsibility for remaining in Kut shifted from Townshend to Nixon. It was the correct decision, but it cannot be held against Townshend as a reason for the loss of the 6th Division. Townshend later wrote: 'Under the circumstances--an absolute promise of relief--it was sound strategy, as otherwise the whole of Mesopotamia would have been lost. I had overwhelming numbers on me (sic); and had I delivered a battle in the open, I must have been defeated.'[3] He replied to Nixon that the promise on 7 December of the 28th Brigade, newly-arrived from Egypt, at Sheikh Saad within a week 'altogether alters matters.'[4] The Turks, however, reached Sheikh Saad first, and the British advantage was lost.

The first thing that Townshend had to do on 4 December, after the decision not to march his men any further, was to turn Kut into a secure defensive position. Although the press release from Basra stated

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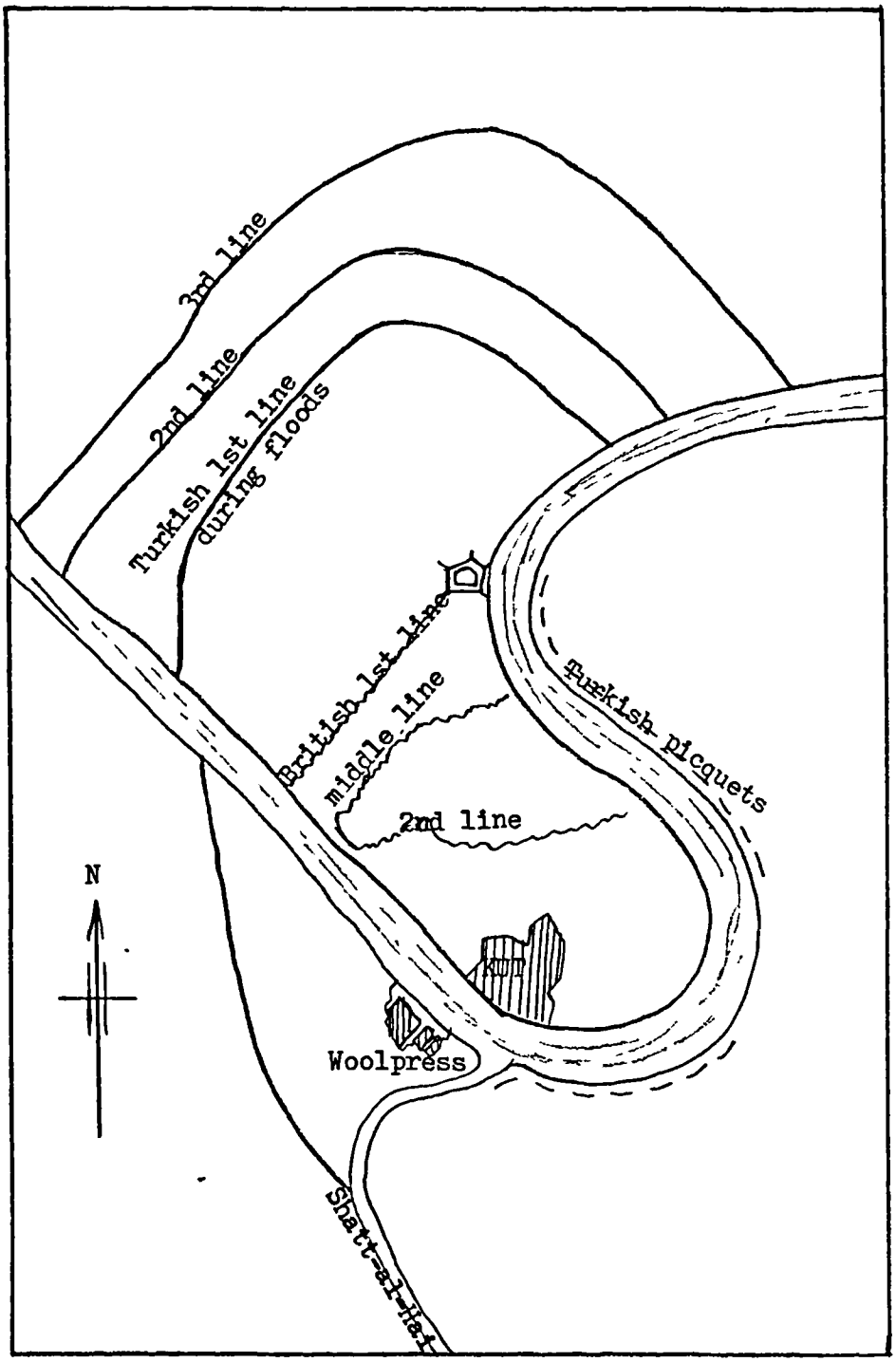
[1] Moberly, vol. 2, p. 137.

[2] Tel. no. 1008-117-0, Nixon to Townshend, 6 Dec 15, WO/106/53.

[3] Townshend, p. 219.

[4] Tel.no. 1946, Townshend to Kemball, 7 Dec 15, Meso Comm, App. LXIII.


3rd line
2nd line
Turkish 1st line
during floods
British 1st line
middle line
2nd line
Turkish picquets
N
Kut
Woolpress
Shatt-al-Hai

KUT-AL-AMARA

that the 6th Division was withdrawing into the fortified lines at Kut, in reality the defences were practically nonexistent.. Never thinking the Turks could win at Ctesiphon, Kut had only been prepared to defend against Arab raiders, and one barbed wire fence between four blockhouses constituted the preparations. Townshend's men had to dig trenches across the 2,700-yard wide neck of land that faced the Turks. Here Townshend's defensive strategy again comes under criticism. For about a week after their arrival, the British were able to maintain a bridge across the Tigris. It was not, however, fortified to any great extent owing to the work being done on the trenches. A Pubjabi detachment held the far end, and the last of those leaving Kut (most of the cavalry and transport animals) departed across it on 6 December. On the 9th, soon after the bridge had been rebuilt in a more defensible location, Townshend ordered its destruction. His critics claim that this forced him into a passive defence and destroyed any chance he might have had either to break out or to cooperate with the relief force. He himself lamented the fact that he could no longer carry on an active defence. Knowing that the Turks would leave only a small covering force around Kut while the main body concentrated against the relieving army, an active force in the rear would have been invaluable. Bridges, however, can be crossed in both directions, and, since there 'had been no time or organisation to establish a bridgehead on the right bank'[1] Townshend could not risk an attack from two sides. Further, the Turks also had orders to destroy the bridge, so Townshend considered it best to disable it in such a way that its remains stayed in British possession.

[1]Quetta Staff College, p. 231.

Thus, the bridge supports on the right bank had to be destroyed by volunteers under heavy fire in order that the flow of the Tigris would push the bridge into the bank on the British side.[1]

Once the defences began to take shape, Townshend had to consider his supplies of ammunition and food. On 4 December, the 6th Division had 822 rounds per rifle, there being 7,250 infantry in action, plus 18,674 shells of various calibre for thirty-five guns.[2] Vast quantities remained at the end of the siege owing to the passive nature of the action there during the last four months. The amount of food in Kut is a question that will probably never be answered. According to Major-General T. L. Davison, Inspector-General of Communications, Kut held adequate supplies to maintain the division for two months.[3] According to Colonel P. Hehir, Assistant Director for Medical Services, there was 70 days supply of flour and rice for British and Indian troops and followers (which numbered approximately 3,500[4]) at full rations, plus a month's supply of curry stuffs, fresh meat (not counting meat on the hoof) and potatoes.[5] That a minimum of six weeks' worth of food at full rations was available was known in Basra, India and London early in December. It is Townshend's administration of the food supply that draws the greatest criticism, and to an extent it is justified.

On 4 December Townshend ordered a survey of all the supplies available in the town for possible confiscation, and authorised the buying

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[1] Barker, Neglected War, pp. 155-56.

[2] Townshend, p. 358.

[3] Meso Comm, Maj.-Gen. T.L.Davison, 28 Nov 16, statement.

[4] Braddon, pp. 123-24.

[5] Meso Comm, Col. P.Hehir, Account of the Medical Arrangements, etc., during the siege of Kut-al-Amarah, App. III.

of grain from the inhabitants.[1] There were 8,893 soldiers, some 3,500 followers and some 5,000 townspeople to be fed. Townshend expelled about 700 locals who could not prove that they were residents, but decided not to clear the town for humanitarian reasons. He did not wish to expose the population to the harsh weather and even harsher treatment of the marauding Arabs, so he reluctantly allowed them to remain, and they had to be fed. It is not clear just when the town's supplies of food came fully into British hands, but the Supply and Transport Corps were given control of the food supply. Lieutenant H. S. D. McNeal, who was one of the wounded exchanged after the siege, told the Mesopotamia Commission that 'all Arab grain was, of course, confiscated at the commencement', but the Supply and Transport personnel 'were so uncertain of the limit of the food supply that it was found, both at the fort and at Woolpress [across the river] that atta [course flour] was being used in sacks for defensive purposes.'[2] This illustrates that the strict control of food was not instituted at the start of the siege. Cox noted that Townshend undertook to find out about the local supplies when he made the decision to maintain the native population. Townshend called for 'Colonel Annesley, the Chief Supply Officer, to take it up at once. Colonel Annesley was there at the time and we immediately started to investigate the question of local supplies.'[3] Further, and just as critical, the restriction of the daily ration did not begin until late January. It is in these two areas, commandeering available rations and the liberal rations scale, that Townshend's critics

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[1] Townshend, pp. 214-15.

[2] Report on the siege at Kut-al-Amarah, Lt. H.S.D.McNeal, CRW/M/15/1.

[3] Graves, p. 196.

are most justified, but he cannot be blamed for not searching immediately for available supplies.

Like most other events in this campaign, the handling of the food supply was subject to a mixture of overconfidence and mistaken assumptions. Townshend believed that the relief force would break through to Kut on its first attempt, and he thus saw little reason to subject the population to a house-to-house search, a move he considered would stir local feeling against the garrison.[1] He therefore ordered that nothing more than an estimate of the town's resources be gathered and the buying of grain from the bazaars practiced rather than confiscation. Not until the relief force was twice repelled, something no one dreamed could happen, did the situation appear critical enough to warrant full siege practices. The town was again searched and the rations cut. As Lieutenant-Colonel Winsloe, another exchanged prisoner, stated:

> Had General Townshend been in possession of information as to the amount of Arab grain stored in the town, he undoubtedly would have reported it.
>
> At the same time it must be remembered that during, at any rate, the first month of the investment up to the check at Sheikh Saad, there was complete confidence among all the troops in the Garrison, that General [Sir Fenton] Aylmer's relieving force would easily be able to push their way through. Probably on this account, the responsible authorities did not go so carefully into the question of supplies as they otherwise would have done.[2]

The decision to stay on full rations seems slightly more logical, for the month of December at least, for the men needed all their strength to dig the entrenchments and carry on the fighting. When von der Goltz ordered the starvation of the garrison rather than assault late in

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[1] Wilson, pp. 92-93.

[2] Meso Comm, Lt.Col.Winsloe, R.E., 25 Jan 17, statement.

December, the British had largely completed their defences and should have gone on reduced rations then. This would have extended Townshend's limit of resistance. The question of the relationship between his estimates and the actions of the relief force will be explored later.

As conditions on the Tigris worsened, the authorities in London attempted, too late, to ascertain the real situation. Not until the 6th did Hardinge inform Chamberlain that Townshend's force was about to be surrounded, and this was coupled with a request for immediate reinforcement 'as the distances in Mesopotamia are so great that two months is a very short period in which to relieve Kut.'[1] Chamberlain replied on 9 December requesting Nixon's and Townshend's views 'regarding measures to be adopted, feasibility of holding Kut pending reinforcement or intention to retire to some other selected position.'[2] He further requested information on communications, available reinforcements, supplies and munitions in the country, enemy strength, river and weather situation, and transport. Crewe, now Lord President of Council, whether through ignorance of the facts or in an attempt not to dramatise the situation, told Parliament on 7 December 'it cannot be questioned that the course which has been taken--the determination not to attempt to pursue such advantage as had been gained in the actual fight in the neighbourhood of Ctesiphon, but to retire to a strong position lower down the river--was the course, and one which ought to be generally approved.'[3] In fact, the General Staff only conditionally approved.

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[1]Tel. no. H9615, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 6 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/754/12588.

[2]Tel. no. 3194, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 9 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/754/3194.

[3]Meso Comm, Parliamentary Questions Appendix.

In a paper submitted to the War Committee on 9 December, they correctly surmised the Turks' strategy but apparently did not have the latest information at hand, i.e., that Kut was already surrounded. The Staff detailed the disadvantages of an extended retreat and agreed that 'if local conditions and the state of his troops were such as to warrant the belief that this place could be held until relieved',[1] then the stand could be justified. However, they recommended to the War Committee 'that, provided it is possible to retire down the Tigris, he should do so.'[2] By the time the Committee approved this suggestion on 15 December, Townshend had been cut off for a week.

Meanwhile, in India, Duff was beginning to grasp the realities of the situation in Kut. He feared that the 6th Division's daily casualty rate would soon decimate its strength and the relief force would come too late to save it as a functioning force.[3] He wrote to Hardinge that it was 'beginning to look as if we will have very great difficulty in relieving Townshend, while the more I hear of his actual position at Kut, the less I like it.'[4] He still had the highest hopes for the future, although the overall strategic situation looked grim at the time. In a memorandum on 16 December, Duff theorised that von der Goltz planned to mount a major offensive towards India, based in Persia. In order to circumvent the threat, the forces in Mesopotamia had to be sufficient to threaten the Turkish rear, i.e., Baghdad. Therefore, he agreed with Nixon's request of the 14th for two more divisions, which

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[1] Paper by General Staff, 9 Dec 15, CAB/42/6/7.

[2] Draft tel., War Committee to Hardinge, 15 Dec 15, CAB/42/6/7.

[3] Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 13 Dec 15, HDG/90/1/363.

[4] Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 15 Dec 15, HDG/90/1/369.

would bring Force 'D' to a strength of seven.[1] Hardinge did not share Duff's fears. That von der Goltz would invade India without first defeating both Force 'D' and the Russians was 'a scheme which I can hardly take seriously.' Neither did he agree with the idea of strengthening Nixon's force to such a size. 'Nobody can, I think, dispute the fact that this war will not be decided in Mesopotamia. . . . To divert troops from the decisive point in Flanders is to play the game of Germany, and, in my opinion, this policy has been too often pursued.'[2] This is an abrupt change of attitude from his earlier pleas for troops for Mesopotamia. Duff responded: 'I admit most fully that we cannot win this war in Mesopotamia, the Dardanelles or Salonika, but I incline to think we can lose it in almost any one of them.'[3] Hardinge was not 'in the least depressed by our temporary setback in the neighbourhood of Baghdad. . . . I simply ridicule the idea that [Townshend] would want relief, for with 9,000 men he is supposed to be surrounded by 10,000 Turks and can break through whenever he chooses.'[4]

Hardinge was apparently the only official who had any confidence in the 6th Division's easy recovery. He could not have realised that 10,000 Turks made up the advance force that covered the town, whereas the total Turkish force numbered some six divisions, or 30,000 men.[5] The Turks had been shelling Kut since 5 December, and on the 9th firing intensified. On the 10th the Turks attacked, but lost heavily. Another

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[1]Memo by Duff, 16 Dec 15, HDG/90/1/370.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 17 Dec 15, HDG/90/2/331.

[3]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 17 Dec 15, HDG/90/1/373.

[4]Letter, Hardinge to Cox, 20 Dec 15, HDG/94/2/155.

[5]Quetta Staff College, p. 92.

day of increased shelling was followed by a second assault on the evening of the 12th, which was again turned back with heavy loss. After these repulses, the Turks settled into siege tactics and did not attack again until Christmas eve. On that occasion, elements of their forces broke into the British positions, and fighting was hand-to-hand for a while, but the Turks withdrew Christmas morning after losing 2,000 casualties. The losses the 6th Division suffered in these attacks, plus the casualties from artillery fire (a combined total of 1,625 by Christmas) caused Townshend to again plead for quick relief. Since the reinforcements could only move up the Tigris in small numbers, Nixon cast about for outside aid to help relieve the pressure on Kut. On 9 December Nixon asked Lake in India and the Secretary of State in London to elicit Russian support.[1] Chamberlain complied, but reported on 11 December that the Russians did not have enough troops to move on Baghdad and threaten the Turkish rear.[2] By early January Grand Duke Nicholas was reported to be in favour of cooperation with the British, but he wanted a British force of 20,000 to leave Mesopotamia and join the Russians in western Persia, from whence the combined force could drive through to Baghdad.[3] The British preferred to employ their troops in Kut's relief rather than send the bulk of their forces off to fight the Turks elsewhere.

The lack of early Russian aid and the repeated urgings from Townshend put pressure on Nixon to concentrate the relief force as soon as

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[1]Tel. no. IG1724, Nixon to Chamberlain, 9 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/754/12642.

[2]Tel. no. 3199, Chamberlain to Nixon,11 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/754/3199.

[3]Tel. no. 128, General Hanbury-Williams to CIGS, 2 Jan 16, IO/L/MIL/5/754/14003.

possible. Major-General Aylmer, Adjutant-General in India, arrived to take command of the Tigris Corps on 10 December, a position he held until early March 1916. His attempts to break through to Kut aroused controversy over the actual time limit within which Townshend had to be reached. As stated earlier, the town contained some two months' rations when the retreating 6th Division arrived. Aylmer told the Commission: 'It was understood when I took over command of the Tigris Corps that there was only food in Kut up to the end of January.'[1] Although Nixon told Townshend that two months was the outside limit of relief, he told Major-General Sir George Younghusband, commanding the 28th Brigade on its way to Ali Gharbi, '"Townshend asks to be relieved within a month, but I do not think we can be ready under two months." This was on December 6th or 7th, 1915.'[2] Knowing that rations were available until late January or early February, and that the poor state of the transport precluded the possibility of an offensive of sufficient strength to break through until that time, Nixon and Aylmer still decided to attack with an unprepared force in early January. Nixon told the Commission that it 'was Townshend's reports as to his food that forced the advance.'[3] Yet after further questioning, he admitted 'I knew he had at least two months' supplies', and he stated that he never believed that Townshend could only hold out until mid-January. 'It was on my responsibility' that Aylmer's offensive began on 4 January, Nixon told the Commission. When asked why he ordered the advance so soon, he replied, 'they [the Turks] were pushing down

[1]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Younghusband, 9 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Nixon, 7 Nov 16, no. 10845.

towards us.'[1]

That the relief force was unprepared and lost heavily was then Nixon's responsibility, not Townshend's. True, Townshend's reports of his food supply were inaccurate, or incomplete, and he regularly pleaded for early rescue, but it was not Townshend who commanded the relief, and it was Nixon's desire to strike before the Turks grew stronger. That Nixon acted of his own accord is shown in the accounts of his superiors. Duff told the Commission that for the first attack in January, 'General Nixon did not ask for permission; he merely stated his intention.'[2] Chamberlain had written to Hardinge earlier criticising Nixon's 'complete miscalculation' of the Baghdad offensive and mentioning that Kitchener had considered replacing him.[3] After Nixon asked for two extra divisions to operate on the Karun,[4] Barrow wrote 'General Nixon is insatiable! I doubt if we could possibly support his suggestion.'[5] Barrow recommended 'the immediate preparation of defensive positions as far back as Kurna and Shaiba' rather than giving Nixon more men to mount other offensives. The War Committee seconded this, although they allowed twelve garrison battalions to go to India to free enough Indian Army troops to make up a fifth division for Mesopotamia. 'After relieving General Townshend, General Nixon's policy should be to act on the defensive.'[6]

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[1] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11601.

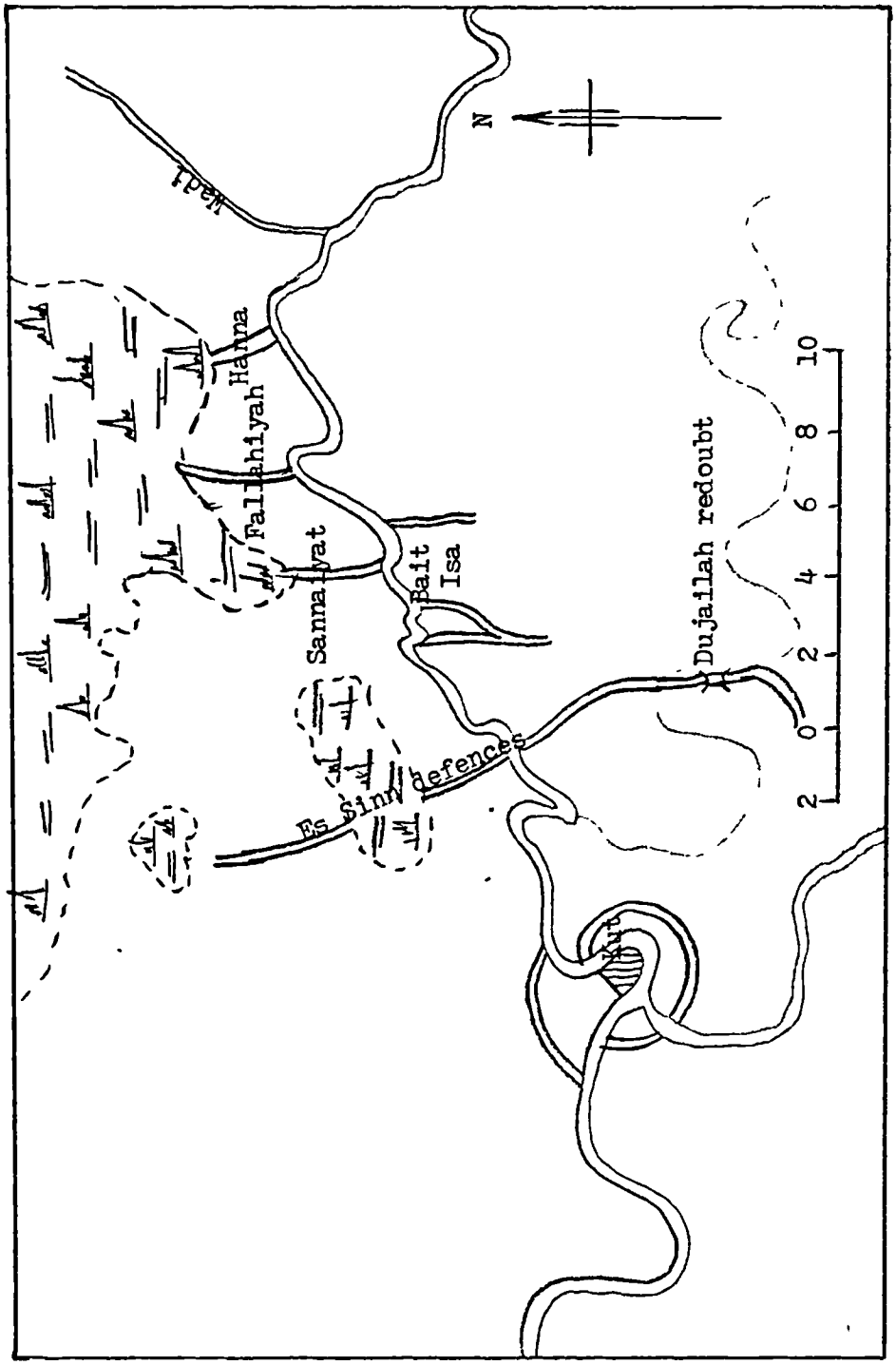
[2] Meso Comm, Duff, 12 Dec 16, no. 15589.

[3] D. Goold, 'Lord Hardinge and the Mesopotamia Expedition and Inquiry', Historical Journal, XIX, 4, 1976.

[4] Tel. no number, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 25 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/754/12855.

[5] Memo by Barrow, 27 Dec 15, CAB/42/6/14.

[6] Minutes of War Committee meeting, 28 Dec 15, CAB/42/6/14.




RELIEF OPERATIONS AREA--JANUARY-APRIL 1915

But first Kut had to be relieved, and to this end operations began on 4 January 1916. The relief force, a division strong, left Ali Gharbi for Sheikh Saad, a march of two days. The attack started on the morning of the 6th, after a dense fog dispelled, but the advance met stiffer resistance than was expected. Aylmer intended Younghusband on the left bank to hold the Turks to their trenches while Brigadier Rice and the 35th Brigade attacked in force on the right. Heavy fire from defences that were more extensive than expected held up the advance on the 6th, while the weather turned bad that night and a chilling rain also worked against the British. Operations on the 7th and 8th were hampered by mud, but on the morning of the 9th the British found that the Turkish trenches had been abandoned. The three-day battle cost the British 3,800 of their 19,000 men, and the fact that the troops, of the newly-arrived 7th Division, went into battle with virtually no medical equipment or personnel, slowed the operations and caused immense suffering. The Turks lost over 4,000 casualties, but left their positions owing to lack of supplies rather than losses in personnel. The bad weather had also slowed their inadequate transport and the advance position had to be abandoned for one closer to their base.[1]

In the midst of the battle, on 8 January, Aylmer sent a message to Townshend asking if he would consider a sortie out of Kut. Townshend replied that he had considered doing so in order to harass the Turks' expected retreat, but hesitated to venture out otherwise. He

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[1]Quetta Staff College, pp. 127-34; Millar, pp. 138-43; Moberly, vol. 2, pp. 222-37.

thought that he might be able to break out of Kut and save some two-thirds of his force, but would have to abandon his wounded and his guns. This correspondence was repeated to Nixon, who ordered them to stop talking about a breakout. 'Army Commander directs you not to resort to expedient of cutting your way out except in desperate extremity. We have plenty of reinforcements here.'[1] Thus Aylmer continued his advance up the river. By 12 January plans were prepared for a surprise attack on Turkish positions behind the Wadi, a tributary of the Tigris. Aylmer moved three brigades and supporting troops across the Wadi during the night of the 12th-13th in order to outflank the Turkish positions facing the stream. When the attack started on the morning of the 13th, the British advanced easily until slowed by artillery fire which covered Turkish reinforcements hurrying to entrench themselves in a dry stream bed. This they accomplished just in time to halt the British, while the troops in defences along the Wadi were able to stop the attack across the river. The evening fell with both frontal and flanking assaults halted, but the Turks withdrew during heavy rains that night. The attempt to cut off the enemy forces failed, and the Turks withdrew into strong positions on a narrow front between the Tigris and Suwaikiyah Marsh. The Turks had lost 2,000 men to the British 1,600, but they had been able to save themselves by an orderly retreat. Aylmer had gained a little more ground at a high cost, but he was still a long way from Kut.[2]

Aylmer was determined to press on toward the new Turkish positions

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[1] Townshend, pp. 240-41.

[2] Quetta Staff College, pp. 127-34; Millar, pp. 148-50; Moberly, vol. 2, pp. 243-55.

at Umm-al-Hanna, and again looked to Townshend for aid. Townshend recommended moving up the right bank as all the Turkish trenches were concentrated on the left.[1] Aylmer, whose effective force now numbered only about 9,000, hoped he could link up with a force from Kut on the right bank while he held the Turks in their trenches at Hanna. 'The best plan seems to me for Townshend to cross [the] river during the night with such available men as he has got in the mahelas and other river transport available and march well round Es Sinn position on the right bank.'[2] Townshend replied that at most he could ferry 4,000 troops across the Tigris in one night with his stock of fifty native craft and one steamer, but to bring across animals and a few field guns would take another three to four days. He started getting the mahelas prepared.[3] Nixon again would have none of it. He said that the Turks should be so weakened that, with reinforcements, Aylmer could move quickly along the right bank and get to Kut, 'inflicting severe blow on enemy', as he did so. Nixon's instructions to Aylmer were negative in the extreme: 'The course you now propose for Townshend in your telegram under reply would be disastrous from every point of view--to Townshend's force to your force to the whole of forces in Mesopotamia and to the Empire and I cannot sanction it.'[4]

Townshend immediately replied that he preferred a breakout across land to one across the river, but had been prepared to cross the Tigris

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[1]Tel. no. 69/91/G, Townshend to Nixon, 16 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[2]Tel. no. 11/132/G, Aylmer to Nixon, 17 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[3]Tel. no. 69/97/G, Townshend to Nixon, 17 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[4]Tel. no. 1008/309/O, Nixon to Aylmer and Townshend, 17 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

if Aylmer had directed him to do so. He much preferred Aylmer moving along the right bank alone and enfilading the Turkish position at Hanna.[1] Townshend's telegram of 18 January stated that as he could not break out with all his troops, he would remain and fight in Kut to the last, then make the best terms for surrender should the relief column not succeed.[2] Nixon reiterated his orders to Townshend on the same day. 'On arrival of Aylmer's column our force should be in superior strength to enemy and neither Kut nor guns nor stores must be abandoned.'[3] This order was supported by Hardinge, who stated that 'it is the desire and policy of Government to hold Kut as a strategic point, and it is only to be evacuated under the sternest military necessity. It is quite clear to me that these views coincide with the opinions of the Home Government.'[4]

This order is among the last Nixon issued. On 6 January he told Duff that the doctors considered him too ill to remain in Mesopotamia and that they recommended his departure within ten days.[5] Major-General M. Cowper, Quartermaster-General for Force 'D', told the Commission that Nixon collapsed soon after his return to Basra from Ctesiphon. 'I mean to say that in the last ten days in January before he resigned, the Doctors were considering how soon we would have to bury him, he was so bad.'[6] Duff decided the only possible replacement could

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[1]Tel. no. 69/99/G, Townshend to Nixon, 18 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[2]Tel. no. 69/100/G, Townshend to Nixon, 18 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[3]Tel. no. 1008/316/O, Nixon to Aylmer and Townshend, 18 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[4]Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 20 Jan 16, HDG/103/2/1531.

[5]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 6 Jan 16, HDG/91/1/14.

[6]Meso Comm, Cowper, 18 Jan 17, no. 19634.

be Sir Percy Lake, the Chief of the Indian General Staff, although he was not in the best of health either. 'He is in the closest touch with all that has happened in Mesopotamia, with the present situation there, with all that we have done and are doing in India to support and help the forces there, and he fully understands the Viceroy's views and those of the Secretary of State.'[1] Hardinge's reply was hardly enthusiastic. 'It is not an appointment which inspires me with a great deal of confidence. . . . he has always struck me as a man wanting in decision and easily biased, while his age, 61 this year, is a serious drawback in a climate like that of Mesopotamia.'[2] He wrote to Chamberlain, 'I was so strongly impressed by [Lake's] delicate appearance, that I am confident that he will not last many months . . . and I really think we ought to have a successor available at any moment.'[3] Had there been another qualified successor, he probably would have been sent in Lake's stead, but there were none at hand. Lake took over command of Force 'D' on 19 January and his first directive from India was a message 'emphasising--what he already fully appreciates--the importance we attach to the retention of Kut.'[4]

This was in reply to Lake's first telegram to India, one he signed but was drafted by the Staff in Mesopotamia. The telegram was an attempt to draw attention to the serious supply situation along the Tigris. It said that without more shipping and Line of Communication personnel any idea of relieving Kut would have to be forgotten. When Duff

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[1]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 6 Jan 16, HDG/91/1/14.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Duff, 7 Jan 16, HDG/103/2/1528.

[3]Letter, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 14 Jan 16, Robertson papers, Liddell Hart Archives, King's College, London, I/13/2/2.

[4]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 20 Jan 16, HDG/103/1/2090.

found that the chief author of the telegram was Cowper, the Q.M.G., he was furious. 'Please warn General Cowper that if anything of this sort occurs again or I receive any more querulous and petulant demands for shipping I shall remove him from the Force and will refuse him any further employment of any kind.'[1] More than shipping was necessary to help the relief force, however. After Nixon forbade Townshend's cooperation with Aylmer, the Tigris Corps tried again to force a passage, but their progress was slowed by rains and high winds.

On 21 January they tried to force the Turkish lines with a frontal attack, but met with only limited success. Again the sea of mud hampered the attack and Aylmer was forced to tell Townshend that, after receiving 2,700 casualties, 'flesh and blood cannot do more than what troops have done against enemy and extraordinary adverse conditions.'[2] He again urged Townshend to attempt a sortie, hoping Lake would approve what Nixon would not. Townshend advised Lake that the 6th Division had three choices: they could try a breakout and save some of the men; they could hold on until the last of his food and ammunition; or they could begin negotiations while he was still strong enough to bargain. Townshend recommended the first course.[3] After discussions with General Charles Meliss, one of his brigadiers, Townshend realised that to attempt a river crossing was too risky and that if it failed it would further weaken his position at Kut and force the loss of what had been achieved by a year's victories.[4] In addition, his outlook for survival

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[1]Meso Comm, Cowper, 18 Jan 17, no. 19381.

[2]Tel. no. 11/169/G, Aylmer to Nixon, 22 Jan 16, WO/158/664.

[3]Townshend, pp. 257-59.

[4]Ibid., pp. 261-62.

had just brightened: stocks of hidden food had come to light.

It has been shown that Townshend started investigating the local supply situation from the first. He stated in his memoirs that on 21 January the garrison had two weeks full rations.[1] On the 24th he reported that he could last for another 34 days. 'This question of the [3,000] horses and mules I had not brought forward until then, as I should not have been justified in killing the horses, and so rendering the division inefficient for service in the field, until Aylmer told me that he did not think he could relieve me.'[2] On 25 January he informed Aylmer that he had just discovered sufficient supplies for eighty-four more days. Townshend explained in his memoirs that although he had directed all foodstuffs to be commandeered, 'the Military Governor had found it easy to buy; so my orders had not been carried out in this respect.'[3] Only after Aylmer's last attempt failed did Townshend feel it necessary to conduct a house-to-house search, which he had decided against early in the siege as likely to be antagonistic to the town's inhabitants.[4] No criticism of Townshend is more justified than this oversight in seeking out hidden caches of food. That he failed to do so indicated a blind faith in the relief force, hardly a realistic view. Lake later wrote 'I cannot acquit Townshend of a serious error of judgement in neglecting to acquaint either General Headquarters or the Officer Commanding the Relief Column with the true state of his supplies.'[5]

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[1]Townshend, pp. 252-53.

[2]Ibid., p. 259.

[3]Ibid., pp. 252-53.

[4]Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18565.

[5]Report on the Defence of Kut-al-Amara, Lake to CGSInd, Jul 16, WO/106/53, no. 5.

Aylmer's opening statement to the Mesopotamia Commission dealt harshly with Townshend on this. 'I am bound to bring this point prominently to notice as it proved more disastrous to my operations than anything else. I had been struggling against a factor in General Townshend's defence which was totally false.'[1] Now that the state of supplies was known, Aylmer halted operations for a while in order to strengthen his force, and no further major action took place on the Tigris for about six weeks.

Plans for the future, both of the garrison and the entire theatre, were under discussion on the Tigris and in London. Aylmer and Townshend formulated another breakout plan in early February. Aylmer planned to thrust up the right bank with 12,000 infantry, plus supporting cavalry and artillery, with the objective of reaching the Shatt-al-Hai. Townshend promised as much support as possible from his outpost across the river at Woolpress, but he could not land troops east of the Hai because of recently constructed Turkish outposts covering the right bank. Aylmer said that he had received permission to evacuate the garrison if he reached the Hai and if the situation warranted such a move.[2] Aylmer had to await the 13th Division from Egypt, whose arrival was estimated to be 2 March at Basra and 15 March up the Tigris. The delay in the force's arrival was a result of procrastination on the part of the Director of Military Operations, Major-General Sir. F. B. Maurice in London, who had not hastened the division's departure from Egypt. The division's departure from France was so late that they could not

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[1]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, statement.

[2]Tel. no. 38439, Duff to Robertson, 11 Feb 16, IO/L/MIL/5/754/14690; Townshend, pp. 269-73.

reach Mesopotamia by 7 February, Townshend's supposed surrender date, so they remained in Egypt to refit. 'We did not make an effort to hurry because we thought it was quite hopeless', he told the Commission, but the division sailed directly word was received of Townshend's extra food supply.[1]

In London, major policy discussions concerning the role of Force 'D' were being carried out. Arthur Balfour, First Lord of the Admiralty, after talks with General W. R. Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, noted on 21 January that they were agreed that 'in Mesopotamia our object should be the security of the troops already engaged, rather than an advance into the interior.'[2] Barrow, in a memorandum three days later, echoed the idea that Force 'D' should assume the defensive, but called for Kut's relief in order to maintain it as the most forward position. He thought Aylmer's force would reach Kut 'before many days', but suggested that it would be wise to 'expedite as much as possible the despatch of the promised troops from England and Egypt to India.'[3] Duff wrote to Robertson that Kut remained the key point of British strategy, and that if it should be lost (the first official concession to that possibility) then a point as far as possible up the Tigris should be held, no lower than Ali Gharbi.[4] Duff's appreciation of the Tigris situation was equally doleful. He noted that Force 'D' numbered 61,455, but that did not necessarily mean that a strong force could be

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[1] Meso Comm, Maurice, 3 Oct 16, nos. 5088-89.

[2] Minute by Balfour, 'The Present Military Position, and Opinions in the War Committee', 21 Jan 16, Chamberlain papers, Univ. of Birmingham, AC/13/3/16.

[3] Memo by Barrow, 24 Jan 16, IO/L/MIL/5/754.

[4] Tel. no. 36369, Duff to Robertson, 27 Jan 16, CAB/42/7/15.

gathered against the Turks. 'All I can say now is that owing to shipping difficulties on the river I do not think we can do much more than keep abreast of requirements at present.'[1] Facing the British, the General Staff estimated six divisions (50,000 men) for sure with a possibility of 16,000 to 20,000 more, and another division expected to arrive soon.[2] The outlook for Force 'D' was not good.

The best description of the British plight on the Tigris is in the Official History, quoted here at length:

> General Aylmer was carrying on operations with an improvised staff, makeshift organisation and inadequate transport, medical and other resources; in fact, under such conditions that only an apparently imperative necessity had justified his attempting offensive operations. These, moreover, had been rendered more difficult by bad weather, which, besides hampering all movements and destroying communications, had given the enemy more time to improve his defences and, by increasing General Aylmer's casualties, had reduced his slight numerical superiority over the enemy. Further, for the trench warfare in which they were engaged, General Aylmer's force was ill-equipped and there was no way of remedying the deficiency. India had not the means of doing so, and, as the output of war material was still insufficient for their own requirements elsewhere, the War Office were also unable to assist. In consequence, General Aylmer's troops had no trench mortars, no heavy howitzers, and but few light ones, no heavy guns or Very lights and a limited number of machine guns. The bridging train was mainly a local improvisation and the country boats of which it was largely composed were unreliable and too heavy for transport overland. The force was very short of aircraft and there were no balloons for observation of fire.
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> The main operations were taking place some two hundred and fifty miles by river from Basra and their successful conduct was much impeded by the shortage of river transport, additions to which were not arriving as quickly as had been anticipated. Further, when they did arrive, besides requiring considerable overhaul after their sea voyage, many of them were without expert and reliable crews, a deficiency it was impossible to make good in Mesopotamia. . . .

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[1]Tel. no. 36369, Duff to Robertson, 27 Jan 16, CAB/42/7/15.

[2]Appreciation by CIGS, 31 Jan 16, CAB/42/7/15.

> To send more [reinforcements] by land than was being done was impracticable, and the rains and heavy floods rendered the track up the Tigris impassable for days at a time; for the track was at this time still below flood level and only the larger waterways along it had been roughly bridged with any material available.
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> Other disadvantages of the river craft shortage were that it rendered the provision at the front of adequate supplies and stores of all kinds a most difficult matter; it prevented the rapid transfer of troops from one bank of the river to the other for operation purposes; and it so limited the amount of land transport which could be sent to General Aylmer's force as to tie him to the immediate vicinity of the river.
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> Reinforcements and stores were arriving at Basra faster than they could be sent upstream; accommodation ashore was limited; there was a shortage of labour; and the staff of the Principal Marine Transport Officer was too small; with the result that the congestion at the port was very great.[1]

It is clear to see that the ineptitude of the administration of this expedition, both in India and Mesopotamia, was phenomenal. Something had to be done to bring order out of chaos. Lake finally gave a free hand to Sir George Buchanan, an engineer with many years experience at the port of Rangoon, as Director-General of Port Administration. Nixon had refused to let him develop the port, but under Lake he was able to transform Basra into an efficient operation, although his work did not come soon enough to help the relief efforts. Even such action as this, however, was not enough to remedy the entire situation, and the War Committee decided to institute major changes. In early February, they 'decided in principle that in future the Commander-in-Chief in India was to receive orders from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in exactly the same way as Commanders-in-Chief in other theatres of war.'[2] This would change the command structure at the top, with

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[1] Moberly, vol. 2, pp. 278-79.

[2] M. Hankey, The Supreme Command, (London: 1961), p. 500.

control of the campaign in War Office hands, and with India acting as the base of operations, without command prerogatives. This did not change the chain of command in Mesopotamia, although Robertson doubted that Lake's age and physical strength were suitable for his efficient functioning as G.O.C. Force 'D'.[1] Duff remarked that Lake had passed his physical examination before going to Mesopotamia, but this was his first ever field command and it was not yet possible to gauge his fitness.[2] Chamberlain noted, 'I think everyone agreed that Lake is not equal to this job',[3] but he remained in command until July 1916.

At first the change seemed more nominal than actual. The official despatch to India stated that the C.I.G.S. was to be the director of operations, but India would remain the main base of Force 'D'. The War Office would make good all requirements of the force that India could not supply, 'subject to general policy, at the time being, decided upon by the War Committee.' All questions of policy for Indian security, as well as that of Persia and the Gulf, remained in India's hands, as did the arrangements for 'our sick and wounded and as to the finance of the campaign.'[4] It was, of course, the sick and wounded who suffered most from the existing administration, owing to the niggardly Indian financial policy. Nevertheless, the change was welcomed by all. Chamberlain wrote: 'This is a great improvement, because they are better supported from home & because Duff will take hints and suggestions

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[1]Tel. no. 13112, Robertson to Duff, 11 Feb 16, IO/L/MIL/5/754/14691.

[2]Tel. no. 38594, Duff to Robertson, 12 Feb 16, IO/L/MIL/5/754/14711.

[3]Letter, Chamberlain to Kitchener, 8 Feb 16, Robertson papers, Liddell Hart Archives, I/13/2/1.

[4]Secret despatch no. 11, Chamberlain to IndGovt, 18 Feb 16, WO/106/52.

from C.I.G.S. which he resented from the S. of S. whom he considered to be merely Barrow under another name.'[1] He told the Commission that he welcomed the change because the expedition had outgrown Indian ability to manage it, and he 'thought the War Office would be more generous to a force they themselves directed than to a force which was outside their immediate purview.'[2] Barrow stated that 'India could supply nothing more; India was down to the bone.'[3] Hardinge's opinion was that the decision was six months late in coming. 'We rejoice in the control of military operations in Mesopotamia being in the hands of the Imperial General Staff. . . . Mesopotamia is no longer regarded as the Cinderella of the campaigns in progress.'[4] The difference in the supply outlook was immediate, Duff noted. 'I am to have all I ask for, and Egypt has been told that in future they are to comply with all my demands. . . . for such results it is well worthwhile to surrender control.'[5] Duff thought it all quite fitting, as he had always claimed that India had risked everything to help England and should now be helped in return.

The fact that Mesopotamia came officially under overall Allied strategy and could expect to benefit because of it did nothing to alter Townshend's situation in Kut. Late in January rations were reduced and they began to slaughter transport animals for food. A Kut diarist noted that horsemeat was first issued on 29 January, five days after

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[1]Letter, Chamberlain to Curzon, 19 Mar 16, IO/L/EUR.MSS./F112.163.

[2]Meso Comm, Chamberlain, 21 Dec 16, no. 17198.

[3]Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 782.

[4]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, nos. 16673-75.

[5]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 8 Feb 16, HDG/91/1/77.

the meat and bread ration had been halved.[1] Within two weeks the large starling population of Kut came under fire and was added to the menu.[2] As horsemeat became a staple in the garrison's diet a problem arose concerning the Indian troops' eating habits. Many refused the meat on religious grounds, and before long scurvy was a growing problem, some five cases a day being admitted to the hospital. The absence of fresh vegetables did nothing to relieve the problem. Townshend informed Lake of the problem and asked for aid from India. On 13 February Townshend received word from headquarters that he could quote 'Imam Masjid, Delhi, as saying there is no objection to Mussalmen eating horse in the stress of war provided it is halaled [killed by slitting the throat] .'[3] This was followed within two weeks by a formal pronouncement of another religious leader who quoted chapter and verse of the Hindu Shastra which allowed Hindu soldiers to eat horse flesh.[4] Townshend observed that only 720 of the roughly 6,000 Indian soldiers had taken the meat ration. The rest, owing to the urgings of the trans-frontier Pathan troops who spoke of early relief, decided to hold out rather than eat meat which they considered unclean.[5]

This was not the only trouble that British commanders were having with some of the Moslem troops. Townshend later wrote: 'How much I regretted that these trans-border men had been employed in Mesopotamia, how much did I suffer on account of these--in my opinion--overrated

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[1]Diary of Maj. J.W.Nelson, 24 & 29 Jan 16, Kent County Archives, WKR/B2/A2.

[2]Millar, pp. 184-85.

[3]Tel. no. 1350/2-A, Lake to Townshend, 13 Feb 16, WO/158/655.

[4]Tel. no. 1350/10-A, Lake to Townshend, 25 Feb 16, WO/158/655.

[5]Tel.,no number, Townshend to Lake, 26 Feb 16, WO/158/655.

troops!'[1] Aylmer, on 21 February, wrote to Lake 'pressing the desirability of relieving the force of all trans-frontier Pathans at once. Aylmer also refers to unpopularity of war amongst Mohammedan soldiers generally.'[2] In his opening statement to the Commission, Younghusband elaborated on this unpopularity: '. . . amongst the Mohammedans there was a distinct disinclination to fight against the Turks, especially those from the trans-border tribes of the North-West Frontier of India. . . . mutiny and desertion were not unknown.'[3] The most flagrant example of this was the case of the 15th Lancers. On 23 February Lake reported that 'four hundred and twenty rank and file out of a total strength of approximately five hundred . . . refused to march this morning from Basra. . . . Remainder of 15th who remained loyal is represented by all Indian officers of regiment and about fifty rank and file.'[4] On the 24th a court-martial was convened and every man was convicted. They were sentenced to punishments ranging from three years hard labour to life imprisonment.[5] Luckily, as Maurice stated, these were 'only isolated instances'[6] and for the most part the Indian troops performed splendidly. Nevertheless, the overwhelming fear in India of jehad spreading through the ranks was supported by such incidents. This same fear of possible Moslem reluctance to fight prompted Barrow to decline France's offer of six native regiments from Tonking and Madagascar.

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[1] Townshend, p. 273.

[2] Tel. no. 137/12-A, Lake to CGSInd, 21 Feb 16, WO/158/655.

[3] Meso Comm, Younghusband, 7 Nov 16, statement.

[4] Tel. no. 1386/3-A, Lake to CGSInd, 23 Feb 16, WO/158/655.

[5] Tel. no. 41442, Duff to Robertson, 1 Mar 16, IO/L/MIL/5/755/16060.

[6] Meso Comm, Maurice, 3 Oct 16, no. 5425.

Chamberlain agreed to the attachment of a French general to Force 'D' for observation, but refused the offer of troops 'in view of their composition', i.e., Moslem.[1]

The food problem was Townshend's main concern in February, but in early March another attempt was made at relief, and he had to develop another plan for a possible cooperative sortie. Aylmer advised him on 29 February that he planned to march six brigades across the desert at night to carry out a dawn attack on the Dujailah flank on the right of the Es Sinn defences. He told Townshend to prepare his artillery for harassing Turkish reinforcements and his infantry for an attack on the retreating Turks. Townshend replied that he would commit two brigades as soon as he saw that the attack was successful. He thought it unwise to send his troops across the river unless Aylmer was in sight, as such a move from the Kut peninsula was necessarily slow in developing. On the morning of 8 March, the attack started and the effects of the preliminary bombardment on the Es Sinn positions were visible from Kut. The supporting troops in Kut prepared to board the steamer Sumana to cross the river. Such was not to be, however. The night march had achieved complete surprise and, at dawn, the main objective, the Dujailah redoubt, was manned by only forty Turks. This was confirmed by a British officer who actually entered the defences disguised as an Arab. No more than 200 supporting troops were in the area. With the objective delivered to them practically for free, the British would not take it. Instead, they waited for artillery to be brought up and positioned, while one brigade would not advance because its commander had orders

[1]Letter no. 3278, Barrow to WO, 29 Jan 16, FO/371/2769/18839; letter no. 3271, Barrow to Robertson, 24 Jan 16, FO/371/2769/14618; letter, no number, Bertie to FO, 10 Jan 16, FO/371/2769/5308.

that laid down a strict timetable for the assault. It did not develop until 1600 that afternoon, by which time the Turks had reinforced the position and were able to hold it, dealing heavy punishment to the attacking troops.[1]

By the time night fell and the assault had been repulsed, the chances of success were minimal. The Kut garrison did nothing since Aylmer's troops failed to break through, and the attacking forces had to withdraw to the base camp at Wadi. This action has been criticised more than any other in the series of attempts to relieve Kut. Contemporary accounts are perhaps the most scathing. A soldier of the Kut garrison wrote that they found out about the failure to attack the redoubt from their Turkish captors. 'This is not the way the I.E.F.D. used to attack. It is very bitter to know we could have been relieved if only they had come on, and not sat down for 12 hours.'[2] Townshend later wrote to Lord Beresford 'I had no more doubt or illusions after this display of half-hearted fighting and I felt we were doomed though of course I did not say so and pretended the oppósite.'[3] In India, Duff's view of the battle centred on the generals: '. ... there must have been incompetence in the command. I cannot understand why Lake should have sat still at Basrah instead of being present personally to direct the most important phase of the operations. . . . it is not the troops who have failed us, but the generals in command of them.'[4] Duff told Hardinge that he might have to take some drastic measures. A few

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[1]Quetta Staff College, pp. 180-84; Millar, pp. 189-200; Moberly, vol. 2, pp. 312-49.

[2]Nelson diary, Kent County Archives, WKR/B2/A2.

[3]Pvt. letter, Townshend to Beresford, Townshend papers, Liddell Hart Archives, King's College, London.

[4]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 10 Mar 16, HDG/91/1/166.

days after the Dujailah battle, he removed Aylmer.

When questioned about Aylmer's dismissal from command, Maurice told the Commission that 'It was not on the ground of any specific strategical or tactical blunder or blunders.' Rather, the authorities felt Aylmer's conduct 'of the operations . . . had not been fortunate', and it was felt that a change at the top, especially to a younger man, would alter the outlook of the troops.[1] Maurice then gave his personal opinion that the appointment of a new commander was not sufficient to save Kut. He considered 'that the operations of March the 8th decided the fate of Kut and afterwards the floods made relief almost an impossibility.'[2] Aylmer was relieved of command on 12 March, to be replaced by Gorringe, the 12th Division commander. In a last letter to Townshend Aylmer regretted not being able to effect Kut's relief, but that it was a more difficult operation than most people realised, especially those who 'sit in an armchair at the War Office.'[3] Townshend sympathised with him. 'I doubt if the authorities at home grasped the difficulties he had to contend with in the way of floods, rain, want of transport, and last, but not least, want of experience and training in a large proportion of his troops.'[4]

It would be another month before the relief force tried another offensive. Townshend meanwhile issued his third communiqué to the garrison. In it he told of Aylmer's failure to capture Dujailah and the subsequent withdrawal to Wadi. He again was forced to cut the rations,

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[1]Meso Comm, Maurice, 3 Oct 16, nos. 5137-38.

[2]Ibid., no. 5189.

[3]Barker, Townshend, p. 192.

[4]Townshend, p. 299.

and 1,100 horses, including officers' chargers, were to be killed. 'I am determined to hold out, and I know you are with me in this, heart and soul.'[1] Lake was not so hopeful. He wrote to Robertson describing the transport problem and its role in the slow progress up the Tigris. Lake mentioned the fact that reinforcements were in Basra when Aylmer attacked on 21 January but could not be moved up-river. Again during the Dujailah battle, the scene at Basra was repeated, this time with 12,000 men and twenty-six guns. He hoped that the arrival of shipping from India could be expedited, but stated 'I cannot however hope before the flood season [in mid-March] approaches to use all the troops at my disposal for the relief of Kut.'[2]

Events at Kut cast a somewhat different light on the Tigris situation, one that the authorities in India and London did not care to consider. On 10 March Townshend received a letter from Khalil Pasha, commanding the Turks in Mesopotamia. Khalil spoke of Aylmer's latest attempt and suggested that no other effort would come so close to success. 'For your part, you have heroically filled your military duty. From henceforth I see no likelihood that you will be relieved. . . . You are free to continue your resistance at Kut, or to surrender to my forces, which are growing larger. Receive, General, the assurance of our highest consideration.'[3] Townshend of course replied in the negative, but he told Lake that negotiations might not be a bad idea. He still had six-weeks' food and a fairly healthy force with which to bargain, and history was full of examples of besieged garrisons negotiating successful

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[1]Communiqué to troops, 10 Mar 16, Lt.-Col. J.W.Callaway papers, IWM, box no. P42.

[2]Tel. no. 1456-G, Lake to CGSInd,13 Mar 16,WO/106/906.

[3]Townshend, p. 294.

withdrawals with honour. Since his reason for holding Kut, to cover a concentration of force strong enough to hold securely the remaining British possessions, had been fulfilled, then to abandon the town would only lose them a town, while his force would be saved. Lake ordered him to do nothing, but promised to pass on the proposal to the War Office. Lake thought that if the Turks should broadcast his request to negotiate then 'evil effects as regards loss of prestige would result which would scarcely be less than the effects which the enforced surrender of Kut would involve.'[1]

Duff agreed with Lake. He thought Khalil's readiness to negotiate was a response to increasing pressure from the Russians, who had just captured Erzeroum and were advancing on Karind in Persia, some 130 miles from Baghdad.[2] Robertson's response was identical to Duff's. He noted that in Turkey anti-German feeling was increasing owing to Russian successes, which forced the Turks to divert large numbers of men to the Caucasus, thus causing the force south of Baghdad to be correspondingly weakened by the shift of men and supplies. Robertson assumed Khalil's overtures to confirm the serious situation in the Caucasus. 'I regard them as an unsuspected perfect indication that success is assured in the event of determined action on your part.'[3] As to Townshend's references to past sieges, Robertson wrote privately to Duff 'I have never read more ridiculous nonsense than his recent telegram with regard to opening negotiations. He evidently has got that little

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[1]Tel. no. 1008-520-0, Lake to CGSInd, 14 Mar 16, WO/106/906.

[2]Tel. no. 43397, Duff to Robertson, 14 Mar 16, WO/106/906; Barker, Neglected War, pp. 142-43.

[3]Tel. no. 14396, Robertson to Duff, 15 Mar 16, WO/106/906.

knowledge of Military History which is almighty dangerous',[1] even though it was correct. Kitchener added the final comment to the scheme: 'I sincerely hope that you Lake and all the Generals (sic) under you realise that it would forever be a disgrace to our country if Townshend's force surrenders and, moreover, that our prestige in the East would undoubtedly be gravely prejudiced by such a disaster.'[2] Lake assured him that everyone was 'striving to attain their object [and] will do everything that is humanly possible.'[3]

Gorringe's task was unenviable. Within a week of his taking command the Tigris began to flood owing to the melting of the mountain snow at the river's source. This hampered his operations in a variety of ways. Not only did the low ground around the river become inundated, but the river itself widened and its current grew faster, making the relief force's bridging operations even more difficult. Further, the flood effectively stopped any cooperation that Townshend might have been able to offer. Nevertheless, Gorringe was determined to break through, and his first attempt to do so came on 5 April. The newly-arrived 13th Division led the attack on the trenches at Hanna, and within a matter of hours five lines were taken with few casualties. By that evening, the positions at Fallahiya, some two miles further up-river, were occupied after slight resistance. The news of the successes cheered the garrison immensely, but the relief force remained fifteen miles away and the Turks held strong positions at Sannaiyat.

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[1]Letter, Robertson to Duff, 15 Mar 16, Robertson papers, I/32/11.

[2]Tel. no. 14587, Kitchener to Lake, 20 Mar 16, IO/L/MIL/5/755/16428.

[3]Tel. no. 27-74-M.S., Lake to Duff, 26 Mar 16, WO/106/906.

Hurrying to meet Townshend's deadline of 15 April, Gorringe ordered a frontal attack on Sannaiyat on 6 April; the 7th Division was repulsed, but dug in close to the Turkish lines. Operations on the right bank had also been successful, the Abu Roman position taken and consolidated on the 5th. High winds and flooding marsh stopped the advance for two days, but the 13th Division, advancing through the 7th's trenches, attacked again on 9 April. The Turks were able to hold their ground and destroy the 'bunds' holding back the rising flood waters. The resultant swampy ground along their front forced a British halt.[1]

Inside Kut, Townshend was again forced to cut rations. On 10 April he issued another message to his troops, informing them of Gorringe's progress as he knew it (wireless communication with the relief force had been intermittent). He had to stretch the garrison's food supply at all costs, so he notified them of the ration reduction. 'I am compelled, therefore, to appeal to you all to make a determined effort to eke out our scanty means so I can hold out for certain till our comrades arrive, and I know I shall not appeal to you in vain.'[2] He further implored the Indian troops to eat horse meat, and they finally began doing so, though probably owing more to hunger than to his appeals. On the 11th, Townshend threatened disciplinary action against all those who did not eat meat. On that day, 5,000 Indians had received a meat ration; more than 9,300 soldiers and followers were eating it within a few days.[3] He reported to Lake that he had sufficient grain to last

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[1]Quetta Staff College, pp. 198-204; Moberly, vol. 2., pp. 373-84.

[2]Communiqué to troops, 10 Apr 16, Lt.-Col. J.W.Callaway papers, IWM, box no. P42.

[3]Millar, pp. 225-26.

him until 24 April, and horsemeat until the 29th, this being made possible only by cutting the ration yet again. Lake thought that Kut might be provisioned by air, and for a while the idea was pursued. Townshend stated that he needed 5,000 pounds of food a day, and on 15 April the air drop started. Conditions were perfect on that day, but only 3,350 pounds were delivered. Never again were weather conditions as favourable, and the average delivery was roughly a fourth of what was needed per day in Kut, and storms and enemy aircraft made the idea only partially viable.[1]

Gorringe made his final attempt to break through. A series of trenches near Bait Isa on the right bank fell on the 17th, but the British had to fight for their lives against a partially successful counterattack that night. This forced a halt to operations on the right bank, and the final assault took place against the Sannaiyat trenches on 22 April. Early success was reversed by Turkish counterattack and no ground was gained.[2] This effectively sealed Kut's fate. The April operations cost the relief force 10,000 casualties, some twenty-five per cent. of the command. The total relief effort, since January, had caused 23,000 casualties, sixty per cent. of the total effectives, not counting those sick. Turkish casualties numbered some 10,000.[3] After the last attack failed, Townshend told Lake that all was lost. 'The news you send is very bad and we must face facts. . . . he will not be able to relieve me except by a miracle and in war miracles do not happen.'

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[1]Townshend, pp. 327-32.

[2]Quetta Staff College, pp. 205-09; Moberly, vol 2, pp. 373-84.

[3]Quetta Staff College, p. 209.

He therefore considered that Lake should contact Khalil and begin negotiations. Townshend was sure Khalil would grant the 6th Division parole because it had acquitted itself so well. The effects of the fall of Kut would be far-reaching, he said. 'The effect of the force falling by having to surrender will be far greater than the fall of Yorktown throughout the British Empire and I believe [the British] Government itself will fall.'[1] In spite of these dire predictions, he recommended negotiations and Lake agreed with him. Lake thought, however, that he might still have one more chance.

Lake thought that a ship should try to run the river to Kut with a month's supplies. The swift current would necessarily slow the ship and make it an easy target, but he considered that 'Any chance however slight I am unwilling to neglect.'[2] The paddle-steamer Julnar was selected as the relief vessel and she was manned by an all-volunteer crew. She sailed on the night of 24 April, but the mission was doomed. The Arabs around the British base informed the Turks of the attempt, and they thereupon strung a cable across the river to foul her paddles. The ship was captured within sight of Kut and all the crew were taken prisoner. This ended the attempts to relieve Kut and negotiations were authorised.

On 25 April Kitchener granted Lake permission to begin talks with the Turks. He reminded Lake that Khalil's men were surely desperate for supplies also, and thus Townshend should not be forced to accept unfair terms.[3] Lake informed Townshend of Kitchener's message and directed

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[1] Tel. no. 1008-674-0, Lake to CGSInd, 23 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

[2] Tel. no. 15714, Lake to CGSInd, 24 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

[3] Tel. no. 15736, Kitchener to Lake, 25 Apr 16, IO/L/MIL/5/755/16916.

him to make contact with Khalil. Townshend declined. He 'remained unconvinced that he was the right person to conduct the surrender negotiations and thought that Lake was in a far better position as he would be playing from strength.'[1] Lake replied that Townshend, with his prestige,would be more likely to obtain better terms. Townshend later wrote that he knew his bargaining position was worthless. 'I had to negotiate with Khalil Pacha, knowing that I had not a biscuit up my sleeve to argue with, and knowing that Khalil Pacha knew I was in extremis for food. . . . But I had to get food at once or all my men would lie down and die.'[2] Townshend met Khalil on 27 April, but nothing was agreed as Townshend refused to abandon Kut prior to negotiations. He still hoped to get his division paroled, as many besieged garrisons had done in the past, but it was in vain. He told Khalil that to take the responsibility of some 10,000 prisoners, having to guard, transport, feed them and pay their salaries was too much for the Turks. Khalil replied that he was ready to do all those things. He assured Townshend that the men of the 6th Division 'would certainly meet with the same reception as prisoners in Turkey as troops of Osman Pasha, the hero of Plevna, had met as prisoners in Russia.'[3]

Townshend, and others, still tried to salvage something from the talks. Kitchener had, in late March, ordered Captain T. E. Lawrence to work indirectly to help the Kut garrison. He had authorised Lawrence and the British authorities engaged in the negotiations, to offer the Turks up to a million pounds sterling as bounty for the release of

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[1]Millar, p. 252.

[2]Townshend, p. 335.

[3]Millar, p. 254.

the division.[1] Lawrence and Aubrey Herbert, of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, joined Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Beach of Townshend's Intelligence staff, in discussion with Khalil. They attempted to negotiate an exchange of British wounded for Turkish prisoners, to which Khalil agreed, provided he was not given any Arabs. 'One in ten of his Turkish troops had proved to be a coward, but only one Arab in a hundred was brave.'[2] The £1,000,000 offer was made, and Khalil, who reportedly agreed with the parole idea, said he would have to speak to Enver Pasha about it. The reply was negative. 'Tell him to keep his money. I have lost ten thousand men.'[3] Townshend, on hearing this, suggested the offer be raised to £2,000,000, but this was not seriously considered. On 28 April Lake reported that the last British offer was 'release of the Kut garrison on parole not to fight during continuance of the war in consideration of the release of an equal number of Turkish prisoners, plus, the surrender of all arms and guns in Kut, plus £1,000,000.'[4] Duff was not optimistic of the chances of success. He wrote to Robertson 'I confess I do not expect that we shall get anything better than unconditional surrender.'[5]

As a last attempt to gain some terms, Townshend wrote to Khalil. 'I am certainly deserving of a better fate than this at your hands. In speaking of the defence I have made you yourself have said that I have carried out my duties in a heroic manner; and now I ask nothing more

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[1]Tel. no. 14895, Robertson to Lake, 29 Mar 16, WO/106/906.

[2]Millar, p. 275; T.E.Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, (New York, 1935), p. 59.

[3]Millar, p. 259.

[4]Tel no. I.G.-2668, Lake to CGSInd, 28 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

[5]Letter, Duff to Robertson, 28 Apr 16, Robertson papers, I/32/23.

than is reasonable and right to expect from a noble adversary and soldier of your repute.'[1] This statement most clearly shows Townshend's basic attitude toward war and its conduct, and it is his major shortcoming; it would bring about the greatest public criticism of his wartime performance. Hailed as the 'Hero of Kut' for his defence, his return to Britain was marred by the fact that he finished the war in luxury[2] while his troops suffered terribly. The above message to Khalil shows that Townshend expected the Turks to treat their prisoners honourably. His failing was that he was a man steeped in military history and his attitudes were formed by that study. Townshend was in the end too idealistic, too much a man of the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century. In the Ottoman Empire, ideas of parole or gracious treatment of prisoners were unknown, but Townshend was still fighting, in Mesopotamia, a nineteenth century war of manoeuvre and cavalry thrusts. The realities of the Western Front brought the soldiers of that theatre face to face with the conditions of total war, but Townshend's experience did not allow him to comprehend such things. If the situation had been reversed, he might well have paroled a besieged Turkish garrison, but this would have been unthinkable to the Indian or British authorities. Thus, when Khalil told him he would be an honoured guest and his troops would be 'interned in places in a good climate near the sea'[3] Townshend took him at his word, because he believed Khalil an honourable man who would strictly adhere to the rules of war.

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[1]Tel. no. 69-470-G, Townshend to Lake, 29 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

[2]Barker, Neglected War, chs. 12 & 13; Townshend, chs. 11 & 12, epilogue.

[3]Townshend, p. 336.

Whether Khalil purposely deceived him or had no control over the treatment of his men is open to question. Townshend believed that the ill-treatment of his men was the doing of the Germans, although this is doubtful. Barker observed in his study of the campaign that 'All that can be said in defence of the Turkish authorities with regard to this sorry tale is that they often treated their own men with inhuman cruelty.'[1]

On 28 and 29 April, Townshend began to perform what he considered to be the essentials before the garrison surrendered. He issued a message to his troops on each of the last two days. On the 28th he spoke of the negotiations and his attempts to gain parole for the division. The next day, however, he was forced to inform the garrison of the surrender. He published the letter he had sent to Khalil requesting generous treatment for his troops. He told them further 'I have received notification from the Turkish Commander-in-Chief, to say I can start for Constantinople; having arrived there, I have petitioned to be allowed to go to London on parole and see the Secretary of State for War, and get you exchanged at once.'[2] His last message to Force 'D' read: 'My guns have been destroyed and am destroying most of the munitions. Officers have been sent to Khalil to say I am prepared to surrender. . . . I am not able to hold out any more and must have some food here.'[3] Townshend burned the Union Jack and left for Baghdâd. As his launch travelled up-river, the men of the 6th Division lined the banks and

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[1]Barker, Neglected War, p. 247.

[2]Communiqué to the troops, 29 Apr 16, Lt.-Col. J.W.Callaway papers, IWM, box no. P42.

[3]Tel. no. I.G.-2679, Lake to CGSInd, 29 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

cheered.

That Townshend's internment was comfortable is not open to question, but it was captivity nevertheless. The only terms short of unconditional surrender that he had been offered was a personal parole, but he would not accept it. His message to Lake on 28 April shows he was not certain that he would go to Constantinople. In the last days of the siege he too had suffered the effects of the weather and short rations, but he told Lake 'My duty seems clear, to go into captivity with my force, though I know the hot weather will kill me.'[1] He realised that once the Turks had him, they planned to use him and the garrison for propaganda purposes. The Turks were 'determined to show the British force captured to the world'[2] and the Committee of Union and Progress newspaper 'Tanin' stated that 'This time they did not succeed in scuttling. This time the English who, when they cannot achieve success, consider it the greatest honour to run away, have been unable to do so as they did at Gallipoli.'[3] Thus, Townshend was paraded around Constantinople before he was confined to house arrest on Prinkipo Island in the Sea of Marmora. That he did not suffer with his troops cannot be blamed totally on him. As pointed out earlier, he did not believe his men would be ill-treated. Besides, as Sherson wrote in his biography of Townshend, 'Is it supposed that Khalil Pasha or Enver said to him: "Which would you like to do--go with your troops, or go to Stamboul?". . . of course Enver brought him to Constantinople to parade him in captivity before the Turkish populace. It was too great a triumph

[1] Barker, Townshend, p. 203.

[2] Townshend, p. 336.

[3] Arabian Report No. XXIa, 4 Jul 16, FO/371/2779/152060.

for Enver to miss.'[1] Townshend, of course, was convinced that he could only negotiate a prisoner exchange with the authorities in Constantinople, so he went voluntarily, but, as Sherson says, did he really have any choice? For him, the trip to Constantinople, the consideration he received, the knowledge that his brigadiers were well-treated, all worked together to maintain his illusion that the honourable Turks would abide by Townshend's ideals of the rules of war.

At the time of the fall of Kut, the 6th Division strength was 13,369[2] and they had suffered 1,746 deaths during the five month siege.[3] The surrender did not bring about the general uprising among the Arabs that had been feared for so long. As usual, they were hostile or friendly according to their proximity to the battle line. The British authorities were, to a man, surprised that the fall of Kut occasioned no Arab or Moslem response. Barrow told the Commission that the surrender had 'much less effect than we anticipated. We thought that after the retirement from Ctesiphon the whole country would be up.'[4] Gorringe explained that the reason this did not happen was the nature of the defence. The British had surrendered because of hunger, not because of enemy attack. 'The Arabs, as I have said, say "Oh, yes, you took Kut but you did not take it by fighting."' In other words, they say to the Turks, "The English turned you out of your positions but you cannot turn the English out of theirs."'[5]

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[1] E. Sherson, Townshend of Chitral and Kut, (London, 1928), p. 328.

[2] Barker, Neglected War, p. 246.

[3] Millar, p. 263.

[4] Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 1012.

[5] Meso Comm, Gorringe, 12 Sep 16, nos. 2814-15.

The attitude of Persia and Afghanistan, from whom the Indian Government also feared invasion via the Northwest Frontier, remained unchanged also. Barrow noted that the advance on Baghdad and the subsequent siege occupied Turkish attentions at a time when they could easily have made major gains in Persia.[1] Arthur Hirtzel, the India Office Political Secretary, stated that the Amir of Afghanistan had remained staunchly opposed to German intrigues: '. . . the Amir has managed to hold his own in a way which astonished everybody.'[2] The Amir reportedly told German envoys that he would join their cause when they arrived in Kabul with 250,000 men, and not before. Hirtzel, however, defended the idea of prestige as a major policy in the Middle East in the face of the Commission's description of it as 'rather an Indian disease.' Hirtzel maintained that if the British did not maintain the offensive and soundly defeat the Turks in Mesopotamia, they would experience trouble with the area after the war. He told the Commission that 'a withdrawal of the Turks for diplomatic reasons because they are beaten somewhere else and not beaten by us [in Mesopotamia] will have no effect on the Arabs after the war but they will snap their fingers at us.'[3]

At all levels the siege of Kut has been viewed as a disaster. First, there are various accusations against Townshend: that he should not have stopped there at all, for not accurately estimating the food supply, for not cooperating with the relief force. As has been shown, most of these questionable decisions were not in his hands at all, but

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[1]Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 675.

[2]Meso Comm, Hirtzel, 7 Sep 16, no. 2036.

[3]Ibid., nos. 2147-51.

the food distribution certainly bears criticism. Barker observed that

> if Townshend's staff had made a proper assessment of the food resources in the first place, the decisive time available for a major relief operation could have been better calculated, the troops properly fed and physically strong and fit for a complementary action to support the break-in.[1]

If all things are considered, would an accurate estimate in December have made that much difference? Liddell Hart said of the relief operations 'The conditions were bad, the communications worse, the generalship faulty.'[2] The battles Aylmer fought in January, the key time concerning the early relief of Kut, were all victories, yet none were exploited because of the defensive skill of the Turks and the marshy soil conditions through which the British had to advance. Once an accurate estimate was in hand, after 24 January, the next attack, after six weeks' preparation, was a failure, as were the others that followed. It therefore seems that Nixon's original reason for attacking, that the Turks were gathering in strength, was a more vital reason for the failure of the relief, as shown by the later battles and the resultant casualty figures. Further, as has already been noted, Maurice assumed (with good reason) that Kut was lost after Dujailah because the flood defeated them after that battle in early March. The Dujailah redoubt, key to the entire attack, was free for the taking, but the British hesitated and the battle was lost. Prior to the floods the defeats were the results of missed opportunities, not because of a lack of numbers or preparation. A survivor of the Kut garrison summed it up in his response to General Rich's questionnaire:

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[1] Barker, Neglected War, p. 283.

[2] Sir B.H.Liddell Hart, The Real War, 1914-1918, (London, 1930), p. 209.

> But even if the Relief Force had been given time to build up numbers, supplies and strong points (with the besieged cut down in rations), does the weather, the quality of the Turkish troops, their movements downstream, the failure of the high command to defeat the Turks in strategy and tactics, the failure of the junior generals (as at Dujailah) to utilise opportunities offered, suggest that the final surrender was not implicit in these circumstances, however long scanty supplies were made to hold out in Kut?[1]

After Kut was taken by the Turks, they later lost it owing to poor strategic decisions. Rather than press on to regain lost territory on the Tigris, and possibly threaten Persia, they withdrew substantial numbers of men to recoup their losses in the north. This set the stage for Sir Stanley Maude's successful offensive of 1917 which led to the capture of Kut and the occupation of Baghdad. As Khalil Pasha wrote, he was forced by General Headquarters at Constantinople to split the Turkish 6th Army, part of it to defend Kut and part to advance on Hamadan, some 250 miles northeast of Baghdad and deep in Persia. Khalil 'did not want to fall into this pitiable situation',[2] but he had no choice. 'The Turks at Kut, instead of continuing their effort against British positions lower down the Tigris as the Germans advised them to do, determined to retrieve their losses in the north and diverted important forces to Persia.'[3] Thus the first flush of victory after Kut made the Turks overconfident and enabled the British to gain a victory within a year of their great disaster.

The major change in Mesopotamia after the capitulation was the official decision to begin a defensive strategy, 'and no importance is

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[1] Questionnaire, Lt. G.L.Heawood, Rich papers, IWM, box 74/49/1.

[2] 'After the Fall of Kut', Khalil Pasha, undated, Townshend papers, Liddell Hart Archives.

[3] F. Chambers, The War Behind the War, (New York, 1939). p. 309.

attached to occupation of Baghdad or to possession of Kut.' However, a position as far up the Tigris as possible was desirable in order to support the Russians, and Lake was told that 'in the event of any weakening of the enemy on his front he [Corringe] should take advantage of it provided that this can be done without suffering heavy losses whether caused by unhealthy conditions or inflicted by the enemy.'[1] The British made small gains around the Sannaiyat position, consolidating their hold, but did not press their advantage when the Turks withdrew the troops occupying the Es Sinn position on the right side of the Tigris. It was not until November 1916, when Maude persuaded Robertson to resume the offensive on the Tigris, that this Turkish withdrawal was exploited and the British started their reconquest of Kut and the offensive toward Baghdad. By that time, however, Force 'D' had been totally refitted and the failures of the first eighteen months in Mesopotamia were rectified. Maude began his offensive only after instituting major reforms in the medical and supply administration. Maude learned from the mistakes of his predecessors, and his advance was a perfect example of the proper care and attention to detail that must accompany any desert campaign.

It was regrettable that only the harsh retreat from Ctesiphon and the ensuing muddle of the relief attempts could bring to light the shortcomings of India's administration of the Mesopotamian campaign. The War Office assumption of command brought about the necessary changes that eventually salvaged the Tigris disaster, but it was too late in coming to save the 6th Division. Public disgust at the squalid state

[1]Tel. no. 15955-MO, Robertson to Duff, 30 Apr 16, WO/106/906.

of the troops forced an enquiry to settle the blame for the mistakes. Townshend was not criticised at the time; most of the newspaper accounts questioned the administration that had forced his defeat.[1] Although he was treated poorly after the war, this resulted from the difference between his captivity and that of his troops. Townshend conducted some of the finest military operations of the war, and it is shameful that these have been overlooked. As Barker observes,

> Much of the criticism of Townshend stems from his self-advertisment, an art in which he was in advance of his time. By his detractors he has been represented as an impudent charlatan, forever blowing his own trumpet, continually wire-pulling and jockeying for position and, as most of these debunkers were Townshend's contemporaries, their opinions cannot be dismissed out of hand. However it is reasonable to point out that other famous men--before, during, and since Townshend--have employed similar techniques and nobody has thought any the less of them for that. Once again one is forced to the conclusion that the real resentment was stirred up as a consequence of his behaviour as a prisoner of war.[2]

Whatever the man may have been like personally, that hardly affected his ability to command, and generals throughout the ages have been regarded as experts in their field no matter what their personalities may have been. As Liddell Hart wrote, Townshend and the 6th Division 'wrote a glorious page in military history.'[3]

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[1] Evening News, 28 Mar 16; The Times (London), 1 Apr 16, 1 May 16, et. al.

[2] Barker, Townshend, p. 247.

[3] Liddell Hart, p. 209.

## CHAPTER 6

## THE MESOPOTAMIA COMMISSION

As early as mid-October 1915 reports were reaching England through private channels that the organisation and administration of the Indian Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia was not all it might be, in spite of the unbroken string of successes they had thus far attained. Chamberlain wrote to Hardinge that he had received reports concerning inadequate medical facilities for the troops on the Tigris, and he wanted to know just what the medical arrangements were.

> I know that the difficulties must be great, and that it is impossible to foresee every emergency, but I trust that you will impress upon all concerned that in this matter of health they cannot take too many precautions and that we shall not question expenditure required to safeguard the lives of our men.[1]

This letter reached Hardinge early in November, but apparently there was no reaction to it. By the time the retreat from Ctesiphon occurred, however, reports became frequent that the wounded were undergoing severe hardship. On 28 December Hardinge remarked to Duff about the 'constant complaints as to the insufficiency of supplies, stores and comforts for the Mesopotamian force.'[2] He asked Duff to investigate.

Thus began a series of investigations and reports that finally culminated in the Mesopotamia Commission Report of May 1917. The -

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[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 14 Dec 16, no. 16371.

[2]Letter, Hardinge to Duff, HDG/90/2/370.

inadequacy of river transport and, therefore, the resulting lack of supplies, medical care and comforts for the troops was the primary cause of the intense suffering that the Indian Army troops had to endure throughout the campaign. Until the reverse at Ctesiphon, Force 'D' was successful only because the troops were splendid and their enemy lacked determination. That the troops remained first-rate in their fighting ability is not doubted; however, the change in leadership quality of the Turkish army, owing to the relief of pressure from the Dardanelles, was sufficient to cause the failure of the overstrained British supply line. The poor supply situation and inadequate treatment for the wounded were widely enough reported in Britain to lead to the demand for a public enquiry. There were letters from officers serving there in which such expressions as "Full rations, for a wonder", "We hadn't enough water and had to drink stuff that I saw horses refuse."'[1] In Parliament there were calls for governmental attention to the problems in Mesopotamia. Lord H. Cavendish-Bentinck (Nottingham South,C) stated 'Nothing surprises me more than the way in which the people of this country have treated these lapses from efficiency and these lapses from humanity on the part of the Government.'[2] The establishment of a commission to investigate the situation did not appeal to the war leaders,[3] but Parliamentary pressure, without regard to party lines, forced its establishment once the papers relating to the campaign were made public.[4] Before the Commission's creation, however,

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[1] The Times (London), 18 Jul 16, p. 9.

[2] Hansard, vol. LXXX, p. 2191, 15 Mar 16.

[3] Debate on the release of Mesopotamia papers, CID, CAB/42/16/4.

[4] Hansard, vol. LXXXII, p. 2972, 1 Jun 16.

Indian Government investigations were carried out, and they formed the basis of the proceedings conducted by the Mesopotamia Commission.

The first of these investigations originated in late December 1915 at the instigation of Hardinge's 28 December letter to Duff, who replied on the 30th. He stated that, in order to get a sufficiently unbiased report, he was not going to assign a regular officer to the case. Instead, Duff employed Lord Chelmsford, past Governor of Queensland and New South Wales, and the next Viceroy, and Surgeon-General J. G. MacNeese, Director of Medical Services in India. Duff apparently had no fear of any adverse criticism. If he had, he would hardly have told Hardinge 'I will leave no stone unturned to get at the actual facts.' Duff's later actions cast doubt on his real desire to accept the facts. He confidently told Hardinge that the complaints of the force were,according to his experience, probably 'very often exaggerated by officers making general statements which are really based on some particular incident.'[1] Duff was soon confirmed in his confidence. Lord Chelmsford, called from India to London to prepare for his accession to the Viceroyalty, never acted on Duff's appointment. Surgeon-General MacNeese's investigation took him only to Bombay and Basra, where he saw the medical arrangements at their best. Thus, Duff received information that was far from complete, and this must have affected his decision to commission a second enquiry.

By February 1916, letters to India told of even more suffering along the Tigris, this time by the wounded of the relief force. Although 'everything was found all right at Basrah and from there to

[1]Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 30 Dec 15, HDG/90/1/422.

India, wherever, in fact, we control matters directly',[1] Duff thought that an independent enquiry should look into the troubles at the front 'before this is forced on us' and Hardinge agreed. Duff appointed Sir William Vincent, member of the Indian Government Council, and Major-General A. H. Bingley, who had served in Egypt since the start of the war and was newly-arrived in India. Hardinge informed Chamberlain of this action on 25 February in response to the Secretary of State's further reports of bad conditions. Hardinge assured him that 'medical arrangements in Mesopotamia have constantly occupied the attention of the Commander-in-Chief and myself, but Nixon never reported that all was not well.'[2] Once again, the 'man on the spot' became ultimately responsible. The new man on the spot, Lake, welcomed 'the arrival of an impartial commission which could record facts.'[3] Lake wanted the pair to investigate Townshend's claim that he had protested against the Baghdad advance; also, they should look into the early advance to relieve Kut, insufficiency of river transport and the resulting shortages.

The directions of the Vincent-Bingley probe were expanded on 31 March to include such topics as those suggested by Lake, should they be relevant to the medical conditions. The original instructions directed them to enquire into the action of the relief force, but this was enlarged to include the entire campaign, although still in a medical context. Most importantly, they were directed not only to investigate the arrangements, but were 'instructed to ascertain and assign

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[1] Letter, Duff to Hardinge, 22 Feb 16, HDG/91/1/110.

[2] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 25 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/5/755/16039.

[3] Pvt. tel., Hardinge to Chamberlain, 2 Mar 16, HDG/100/2/100.

responsibility for any defects found and to state whether individuals or the system were to blame.'[1] In order to assist them, and to mollify the growing public criticism of the conditions in Mesopotamia, Mr. E. A. Ridsdale of the Red Cross was assigned to the Commission from London. Chamberlain thought 'it politic as well as right' to attach Ridsdale so that the Red Cross aid could easily be rendered to Force 'D'.[2] Hardinge, assuming London wanted to add an unbiased reporter, had no objection to Red Cross participation, 'although Vincent could be trusted to give a fearless and independent decision.'[3] This statement shows Hardinge was as ignorant as Duff of the true conditions in Mesopotamia. If they had been aware of them, neither would have been as cooperative in encouraging the investigation.

After eight days of taking evidence in Bombay, Vincent and Bingley left for Basra on 10 March. They were joined by Ridsdale shortly thereafter, and spent some two and a half months gathering information and writing their report. They also received written statements from a number of officers who had been invalided back home to England, dealing with their experiences with the medical and transport problems along the Tigris, in Basra, and on to India.[4] When the Vincent-Bingley Report was submitted to Duff in mid-July, it was exactly what he had asked for, but not what he had expected. The report was, indeed, as fearless as Hardinge had predicted. As they had been directed by their 31 March

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[1]Meso Comm, Vincent-Bingley Report, CAB/19/26, App. 1.

[2]Pvt. tel., Chamberlain to Hardinge, 14 Mar 16, HDG/100/1/123.

[3]Tel., no number, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 28 Mar 16, IO/L/MIL/5/768.

[4]Tel. no. M12842/6, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 17 Mar 16, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

orders, they assigned responsibility for the failures, and their findings were not a good reflection on anyone except the overworked medical personnel in the field. Everyone else was blamed, all the way to the top. They listed as the causes of the hardships the lack of river transport, the shortage of medical personnel, the lack of river hospital ships, the omission of overland evacuation transport, and the incomplete or totally absent medical establishment accompanying the 3rd and 7th Divisions in their relief efforts. It was the shortage of transport that was chiefly responsible. The facilities and stores at the port of Basra were found to be complete for almost the entire campaign, but above Basra the situation was completely different. They summed up as follows:

> As to the responsibility for this state of affairs, we think it was in great measure due to defects inherent in the medical organisation in the Army in India. We also consider that rigid economy which before the war was exercised in respect of military expenditure in India, and the spirit which this policy had engendered as to the comparative merits of economy and efficiency, have contributed materially to the breakdown. . . .
>
> The evidence also indicates that on various occasions the medical arrangements might have been improved by better organisation and co-ordination between the different services, and for this defect the local officers are responsible. We cannot, however, absolve the military and medical authorities in India from responsibility for many of these deficiencies. . . .
>
> We realise the serious character of such findings, but in view of the fact that we are definitely required to assign the responsibility for the breakdown it is obviously our duty to do so to the best of our ability.[1]

Duff was not at all happy with the report. Vincent, Bingley and Ridsdale looked deeply into the medical situation in Mesopotamia, they detailed its shortcomings, and they gave their opinions on where the

1 Meso Comm, Vincent-Bingley Report, CAB/19/26, App. 1.

responsibility lay. Duff did not think so: '. . . the Commisssion have now departed from their terms of reference and embarked upon criticisms of the preparations for the campaign which were outside their purview.'[1] The fact was that the preparations (or lack of them) for the campaign were the direct cause of the medical breakdown. They therefore were completely within their frame of reference. Duff further complained that they had reported on the actions of the Government of India without interviewing any of the members of the Government. Apparently, what they saw in Mesopotamia spoke volumes on the actions of the Government. Duff informed Hardinge that the report could not be published as it was of a 'nature calculated to encourage enemy and to give him information of military value.'[2] Of the 180 paragraphs of the report, he deemed 77 of them to be 'objectionable.' In reality, they were objectionable not so much for their military value as for their exposure of the gross mismanagement of the campaign. He grouped these 77 paragraphs under four major headings: (1) those dealing with operations not yet made public; (2) those showing lack of organisation; (3) those complaining of lack of morale; and (4) those condemning certain officers by name. He thought the first might be militarily important, the last three could be used by the enemy as propaganda to disrupt the morale of the troops. In his listing of various subheadings of objectionable material, it is easy to see how they could lower morale, if they had not already done so. These included indefinite Government policy, clues to British wastage, shortage of transport,

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[1]Memo by Duff, 18 Jul 16, CAB/19/26, App. 2.

[2]Tel. no. M30554, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 18 Jul 16, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

sanitary difficulties, administrative defects, inadequacy of medical arrangements, lack of Staff capability, lack of capability of certain officers, disorganisation of rearward services, criticism of higher administration and various other failures.[1] As can be seen from this list, it is not surprising that Duff did not want the report published. Not only might it aid the enemy, it would also show how poorly India had managed things. He did, nevertheless, send it to Chamberlain and Robertson along with his recommendations for its editing or suppression. In none of these messages did he deny any of the allegations.

Even before the Vincent-Bingley Report was submitted, however, there were moves in London to open a full investigation. The revelation of the medical breakdown was followed closely by the growing desperation of the Kut siege. Robertson saw the relief of the 6th Division as the best way to calm the outcry for an enquiry. 'If Townshend is successfully extricated I dare say we shall hear no more of the necessity for a Commission. It is hoped that we shall not in any case. These Commissions seldom do any good and always do some harm.'[2] However, Kut fell, and the letters to Members of Parliament still spoke of terrible conditions. In May, Asquith responded to requests for information about the campaign. On the 11th he announced the release of papers concerning Townshend's objections to the advance. Pressure remained high for the release of more documents, especially those concerning the medical situation. Sir H. Dalziel (Kircaldy Burghs,L) stated on 1 June 'that we are not putting forward an unreasonable demand in asking that

[1]Tel. no. M30554, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 18 Jul 16, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

[2]Letter, Robertson to Chamberlain, 6 Mar 16, Robertson papers, I/35/14.

we should have an opportunity of discussing a matter of so much military and public interest.'[1] Bonar Law responded that 'the Government have come to the conclusion that it is better, on the whole, that the Papers should be published, and that the House of Commons should be given information.'[2] He added, however, that the release was conditional: nothing could be produced that was too confidential or gave information to the enemy.

The release of the papers was agreed in theory, but the Government still did not make them available. By mid-June Members of Parliament were pressing for them. Lord Middleton, on 21 June, requested that the papers concerning the entire campaign, especially the Baghdad offensive, be made available. He asked for their release because 'some of those responsible for the provision of troops have not yet risen to the full measure of their responsibility, [and it was] highly desirable that there should be a full enquiry upon this question at the earliest possible moment.'[3]

In late June, the Cabinet debated the release of the Mesopotamia papers. The Admiralty and Foreign Offices were not opposed to their publication, but the War Office strongly protested. Robertson marked those papers he thought 'most objectionable to publish at this time', but stated that even those remaining could be used by 'an astute enemy, reading between the lines.' The Imperial General Staff recommended that they be withheld.[4] The Cabinet had to consider at the same time

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[1] Hansard, vol. LXXXII, 1 Jun 16, p. 2973.

[2] Ibid., p. 2977.

[3] Debate on the release of the Mesopotamia papers, CID, CAB/42/16/4.

[4] Ibid.

the release of the papers concerning the Dardanelles campaign, to which the General Staff equally objected. The Cabinet thought that the publication could have serious disadvantages: it might prejudice the success of the Mesopotamian campaign; it would 'throw a flood of light' upon Allied Middle East policy; it would reflect the actions of Allied Intelligence; the enemy would learn what were considered to be his weaknesses; the enemy would gain a good amount of tactical knowledge; and it would reassure the Turks that the Dardanelles were safe from renewed attack.[1] Chamberlain in mid-July told the Cabinet that he did not object to the partial release of the papers that Bonar Law had mentioned to the House, but that he was afraid that without the entire story inaccurate conclusions would be drawn. Asquith decided, with the support of the Cabinet, to announce that the papers could not be released, that the conditions Bonar Law had mentioned in May had to be invoked owing to Army Council objections.[2]

This satisfied no one in Parliament. The Cabinet had to decide then if the political advantage of releasing the papers would outweigh military disadvantages. Asquith went to Parliament on 18 July with his objections to publication, but suggested a debate on the 20th to resolve the matter.[3] He reiterated at the outset of the debate the military disadvantages. He did not, however, wish to create dissension in Parliament. 'I should deprecate, on behalf of the Government, a Debate which gave the impression to the world outside that we are in any way

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[1]Debate on release of the Mesopotamia papers, CID, CAB/42/16/4.

[2]War Committee meeting, 11 Jul 16, CAB/42/16/5.

[3]Hansard, vol. LXXXIV, 18 Jul 16, pp. 850-55.

divided among ourselves.'[1] The Cabinet had settled on a compromise between outright publication and total withholding of the papers. Asquith announced that two separate enquiries, one for Mesopotamia and one for Gallipoli, would be instituted. This was not a popular compromise with many Government ministers. Sir Edward Grey and Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the War Committee, thought the Government would have been wiser to resign.[2] Hankey later commented that all the Offices connected with the Mesopotamia campaign 'would be diverted from their paramount task of winning the war to raking over the ashes of the dead past . . . and all the risks to be run at a time when the nation and the Empire were fighting for their very existence.'[3] Nevertheless, something had to be done. As Attorney-General Sir Frederick Smith told Parliament at the outset of the debate on the Report, 'at the then state of public opinion there was no other immediately available form of enquiry which could have been used for the purpose of quieting public opinion, and bringing, if possible, solace to those who suffered, or confirmation of the wrongs under which they were labouring.'[4]

The question immediately arose concerning the composition of the enquiring bodies. Asquith suggested a Commission of men from both Houses of Parliament and from the public sector. Sir H. Dalziel objected: 'After all, this House is responsible to the country and need not go to outside gentlemen, who represent no constituents at all.'[5]

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[1] Hansard, vol. LXXXIV, 20 Jul 16, p. 1236.

[2] Goold, pp. 944-45.

[3] Hankey, p. 521.

[4] Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2154-55.

[5] Hansard, vol. LXXXIV, 20 Jul 16, p. 1245.

He suggested a committee from the House of Commons alone. Asquith was accommodating. The Government submitted the Commission Bill on 24 July, basing it on a motion worded by Sir E. Carson (Dublin Univ., C). It was founded on precedents set by the Special Commissions Acts of 1885 and 1888, and the Metropolitan Police Commission of 1886.[1]

Parliament discussed mainly the Commission's composition. On 26 July the Government suggested the names of Lord George Hamilton as Chairman, along with Lord Hugh Cecil, the Earl of Donoughmore, Sir Archibald Williamson and John Hodge.[2] Dalziel objected to Hamilton as Chairman on the ground that he, being on a Government pension, would be biased in favour of the Government. Asquith and other Members sufficiently established Hamilton's credentials and impartiality to retain his nomination. Others suggested the addition of both naval and military representatives for ready expert advice.[3] Asquith responded 'that the naval and military experts should give their evidence as witnesses to a body which has neither a naval or military element in its composition.'[4] This, however, was overridden by Parliament and representatives of both services were included. The final debate on the exact wording of the Bill took place on 1 August when it was given its third reading.[5] Throughout the debate, there was little, if any, disagreement on the idea of a Commission from anyone in any party.

On 1 August Parliament passed the 'Special Commissions (Dardanelles

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[1]Hansard, vol. LXXXIV, 20 Jul 16, p. 1359.

[2]Ibid., 26 Jul 16, p. 1706.

[3]Ibid., p. 1707ff.

[4]Ibid., p. 1725.

[5]Text of the Bill in App. 1.

and Mesopotamia) Act, 1916', formally creating the two Commissions. Royal Assent was given on the 17th. The members of the Mesopotamia Commission held an informal meeting at the Local Government Board on 10 August. Here it was decided to hold the first hearing on the 21st. On that day, the Commission sat at Committee Room 4 at the House of Lords, with Lord George Hamilton, a former Secretary of State for India, as Chairman. The members were the Earl of Donoughmore, General Sir Neville Lyttelton, Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir Archibald Williamson, John Hodge and Commander Josiah Wedgwood.[1] The Commission was appointed

> for the purpose of enquiring into the origin, inception, and conduct of operations of war in Mesopotamia, including the supply of drafts, reinforcements, ammunition and equipment to the troops and fleet, the provision for the sick and wounded, and the responsibility of those departments of Government whose duty it has been to administer to the wants of the forces in that theatre of war.[2]

The major topics explored by the Commission will be discussed in the same order as was called for in their appointment. They will be covered under the headings of (1) inception and conduct of the campaign, (2) the state of the port facilities, (3) river transport, (4) the medical situation, and (5) the Indian Government actions and responsibilities.

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[1]The Earl of Donoughmore had been Undersecretary of State for War, 1903-05, and Chairman of Committees, House of Lords, 1911; Gen. Lyttelton had been CIGS from 1904-08 and GOC of forces in Ireland, 1908-12; Adm. Bridge retired in 1904, but presided at the North Sea Enquiry Commission in 1904; Lord Hugh Cecil, MP(U) Oxford University since 1910; Sir Archibald Williamson, MP(L) Elgin and Nairn since 1906; John Hodge was Acting Chairman of the Labour Party in Commons in 1915; Commander Wedgwood, MP(L) Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1906, had recently returned from serving in action at the Dardanelles.

[2]Special Commissions Act, 17 Aug 16, CAB/19/9.

Inception and Conduct of the Campaign

Prior to the First World War, Great Britain had extensive interests in the Persian Gulf area. She had defence and trade agreements with most of the local sheikhs and, as war neared, she grew increasingly interested in the area because of the Baghdad Railway and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. All of these trade interests were without support in the form of any contingency plans for military action to protect British interests. In May 1911, the General Staff delivered a paper to the Committee for Imperial Defence in response to a request from the Foreign Office. The General Staff considered that the limit of British military intervention could be support for the Sheikh of Koweit by the landing of a small force in that district should Turkey act provocatively. They did, however, see serious drawbacks to such action. If any force was to land in Turkish territory (and Koweit was nominally under Turkish suzerainty) then it could have a two-fold effect. First, it could provoke a Turkish military response in another area, such as the Egyptian frontier. Second, it could arouse Moslem sentiment against Britain if the landing was not undertaken in certain conditions: the only proper instance would be in response to an appeal from the Sheikh of Koweit to intervene against Turkish military action. This might influence the neighbouring tribes to bring their active cooperation against the Turks, who were not popular masters. Should a force have to be committed, the General Staff assumed that the Indian Army would perform the task, and it would be a relatively easy one, as few Turkish troops were in the area. A small British force could easily maintain itself with naval support. This action should only be taken to bring political pressure

to bear, not to provoke hostilities. 'Such operations would not meet the contingency of a war with Turkey, and it is not proposed that in the event of war the British line of advance should ascend the valley of the Euphrates.'[1]

In response to this paper, General Sir O'Moore Creagh, Commander-in-Chief in India from 1909 to 1914, commented that he considered the Persian Gulf as a likely theatre of operations, but the Indian Army was unable to intervene. 'I pointed out that the despatch of even a small force owing to our numbers and considering the other duties of the army, might be attended with great difficulty. I pointed out that our deficiencies in medical and transport personnel were very serious.'[2] General Sir Douglas Haig, Chief of the Indian General Staff at this time, agreed with Creagh's prediction that the Turks might pose a serious threat in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Army was ill-prepared to meet them. Hardinge refused to give credence to these warnings. 'In his indignant reply [to Haig] Hardinge was confident that there was no possibility of anything beyond very minor operations being carried out by India outside her frontiers against a major power.'[3] Hardinge refused to look past the frontiers of India, and Duff, who became Commander-in-Chief in March 1914, looked little further, and with reason. He claimed that the Indian responsibility for military action extended no further than the Persian Gulf; anything up-river of Basra was War Office responsibility 'and India was not allowed to collect intelligence or formulate plans thereon. I received no plans of operations from

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[1]Report of the Imperial General Staff, 1 May 11, CID paper 104-D, CAB/38/17/25.

[2]Meso Comm, O'Moore Creagh, 21 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Goold, p. 921.

the War Office.'[1]

Thus, when war broke out in August 1914, India was not prepared to do anything other than defend herself from local uprisings. India did, however, despatch the cream of her troops to fight in France. This has always been believed to have been in fulfilment of demands by the War Office, but this has lately been questioned. Goold states that Hardinge 'showered Crewe with a stream of strongly worded telegrams and letters, in which he argued that India would remain loyal, and would contribute generously to the war effort if some of her troops were sent to the Western Front.'[2] Duff's comment was 'I think you may say the Indian Government willingly agreed to 'A' [the force sent to France].'[3] The War Office also directed India to send expeditions to British East Africa and German East Africa. Thus, by early October, when the Persian Gulf expedition was being planned, India had no desire to part with any more troops. She did despatch Force 'D' on London's orders, but, unlike Forces 'A', 'B' and 'C' the War Office did not control Force 'D', although they ordered its formation.

The leading elements of Force 'D' were sent with sealed, written orders. No discussion of the campaign, its conduct or objectives, was undertaken between Duff and the General Officer Commanding. This is the first hint that Indian interest in the campaign's conduct was not to be close. Duff stated 'we were simply sending an organised division and everything had long been laid down as to what it would require or what was assumed it would require. Everything of that sort was cut

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[1]Meso Comm, Maurice, 3 Oct 16, no. 5246.

[2]Goold, p. 924.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14921.

and dried.'[1] This describes India's attitude toward Force 'D'; everything that was sent to it was strictly laid down by regulation; no investigation was done into the special conditions that would prevail in Mesopotamia or what special items had to be provided for the care of the troops.

Once Force 'D' was despatched, India was loathe to part with any more men. Hardinge and Duff were convinced that they had been robbed of sufficient troops to defend India properly after their early generosity. Thus came about the arguments between Hardinge and Crewe (then Chamberlain) as to the supply of drafts and reinforcements from England rather than India. This desperation to keep troops in India reached its peak just prior to the Baghdad advance, when Duff advised Hardinge that London 'will send us the required force if we hold out, but they will give us nothing if the least sign of willingness to find reinforcements is shown by us, and we shall have to do it all by ourselves.'[2] The London authorities were naturally displeased with India's recalcitrance. Kitchener told Duff that losing India was preferable to losing England. England could survive without India, 'whereas if we were finally beaten on the Continent of Europe, the Empire, including India, would be done for.'[3] Duff responded to the Commission saying 'I should have required that from another authority. . . . If I had received that from the India Office I would have given anything they liked. But I was sent out there to defend India, not to lose it.'[4] Hardinge agreed with

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[1] Meso Comm, Duff, 12 Dec 16, no. 15686.

[2] Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15298.

[3] Meso Comm, Crewe, 14 Sep 16, no. 3134.

[4] Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, nos. 14980-81.

Duff's position. He wrote to Crewe that '"India has done her duty to the Empire" and he spoke of "our generosity to His Majesty's Government."' The Commission thought this 'was not the attitude of an Englishman but of an Indian Rajah.'[1]

Nevertheless, the Indian authorities did have some basis for concern. Hardinge testified that during 1915 there were seven native attacks on the Northwest Frontier, five of them being 'most serious.' 'Our troops were at the moment absolutely weaker than they had ever been before or will ever be again, I trust.'[2] India Office Military Secretary Barrow supported this in a June 1915 memorandum pointing out that overseas expeditions had virtually denuded India of a defensive force. India despatched overseas six and one-third divisions of the nine it had mobilised by the end of 1915, leaving almost three divisions plus thirty-three volunteer battalions to defend the country. Yet the Commission learned that Indian authorities apparently did not press for more troops as strongly as they might have done. Duff, when accused of doing less for England than Turkey had done for Germany, answered 'I suppose that Turkey takes men by compulsion. I could easily get men if you gave me the power to introduce compulsion but I never had it.'[3] He admitted soon thereafter that he had never asked for it, except to provide menial labour. The Government 'opened recruiting in India to a very large extent' but were unable to provide anything more than a volunteer machine-gun company.[4] Barrow stated that the white male

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[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14982.

[2]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16533.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14679.

[4]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 141.

population of India (as of the 1911 census) was 143,974, not including British troops. He further told the Commission that in February 1915, Indian volunteer forces, unmobilised, numbered 42,543.[1] He said that the thirty-three battalions of volunteers, which could be used for local defensive purposes, 'Have never been mobilised because that would interfere with their vocations in civil life very much.'[2]

Barrow's memorandum of 7 June 1915 stated that 'at the present moment the military security of India rests on our well established military prestige and trust placed in a just and paternal administration.' The rest of the memorandum,however, gives the impression that military strength in India was quite sufficient, and that 'prestige and trust' were well supported by arms. He observed that the number of British troops was in excess of the estimated requirements, and they were in a stronger proportion vis-à-vis the Indian troops, and that internal defence would be weakened if the troops for frontier operations had to be mobilised, a situation he thought would come about only in the case of an Afghan invasion or a very large native uprising. The worst part of the situation was that India was having difficulty maintaining her armies overseas.[3] When India sent troops to France, she agreed to pay the army's ordinary expenses while there, even though France was outside India's areas of interest (Egypt, Persia and the Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Siam, East Africa according to the Commission of the Administration of the Expenditure of India in 1900[4]). The Home

[1] Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, no. 169.

[2] Ibid., no. 135.

[3] Minute by Barrow, 7 Jun 15, IO/L/MIL/5/751.

[4] B.R.Tomlinson, The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-47, (London, 1979), p. 108.

Government normally paid the full expenses of the Indian Army when used outside these areas of interest, and any extraordinary expenses of the Army when fighting elsewhere. India was obliged to pay only the normal maintenance expenses of her Army during wartime, and only do so within her areas of interest. India was therefore paying for all her armies in the field, when Force 'A', at least, should have been totally kept by the British Government.[1] Britain did, however pay an increasing amount of extraordinary expenses as the war progressed; her outlay almost doubled in the second year of the war when India's expenses only went up some ten per cent.[2]

Still, as Barrow's minute shows, the military situation in India was not as deficient as it was claimed to be, and could easily have been stronger, considering the manpower available. Therefore, with a more judicious use of the resources of Indian personnel, they could have provided a sufficient force to meet the requirements of Force 'D', especially in the case of Townshend's advance on Baghdad. Hardinge told the Commission that 'we had not received a single draft to any of those British regiments, not one since the beginning of the war.'[3] This not only forced Townshend to operate with units that were seriously understrength, it also forced every fighting man in Mesopotamia to be at the front continually, as there were no replacement units for periodic relief. Never in France were troops forced to remain in the line for an entire year. Thus, from the standpoint of personnel, India was negligent

[1]Tomlinson, p. 108.

[2]Ibid., p. 109.

[3]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16512.

in doing all it could to provide sufficient troops for Force 'D'. More men could have been sent to Mesopotamia, giving Townshend not only adequate numbers to carry the day at Ctesiphon, but also to give Force 'D' enough personnel for a rotation system for the troops.

The Port Facilities

. Had India procured sufficient troops and made them available to Mesopotamia, they would have been forced to undergo the same hardships as those already in the country. There can be little dispute that the amount of supplies shipped from India was sufficient for the needs of Force 'D' (at least until Ctesiphon), but it was impossible to distribute them properly owing to the dearth of facilities at Basra and on the Tigris. This makes the fate of the soldiers fighting in Mesopotamia particularly ironic. The supplies, comforts and medical stores they desperately needed were, for the most part, in sufficient quantities in the country, but they were all locked up in Basra. Before a discussion of the river transport can be undertaken, it is important to understand the state of affairs at Mesopotamia's port of entry.

When Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn arrived on the Shatt-al-Arab in early summer 1916 to assume the post of Inspector-General of Communications, he wrote, 'As we entered the anchorage, a melancholy sight appeared, twenty ocean steamers loaded with supplies and military stores lay awaiting unloading and had been so for a week, so devoid was Basra of wharfage, port labour or port craft.'[1] The official history of the campaign states that Basra was the best available base, 'though

[1]MacMunn, pp. 207-08.

it possessed many natural disadvantages',[1] not the least of which being the extremely poor drainage of the town and its environs. All ships unloading at Basra had to move their cargo by lighter, because the only available wharves were at Maqil, just up-river from Basra. Five wharves had been built during 1915, but they were not extensively used owing to the normally flooded conditions there, and because of their distance from Basra. Captain W. B. Huddleston, the Principal Marine Transport Officer for Force 'D', testified that the average stay of a cargo steamer at Basra was ten days owing to the lack of wharfage, lighters and labour.[2] Sir Arnold Wilson, Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia, later wrote that some ships had to wait in the river a month before they were unloaded.[3] The port was never improved as Nixon did not want to incur the expense until it was absolutely necessary, and he considered the functioning of the port, throughout 1915, as adequate for his needs.[4] Not until the vast influx of troops in late 1915 and early 1916 did he find the port inadequate, but by then it was too late to improve the port in time to aid in Kut's relief.

Even when Nixon began to realise the difficulties that the conditions in Basra were causing, he did not act to remedy the situation. Sir George Buchanan was sent by India to Basra in mid-December 1915 with the title of Director-General of Port Administration and River Conservancy. After years of managing the port of Rangoon, Buchanan was

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[1]Moberly, vol. 2, p. 189.

[2]Meso Comm, Huddleston, 31 Oct 16, nos. 9896, 9900.

[3]Wilson, p. 113.

[4]Moberly, vol. 2, p. 189.

recognised as being an expert in his profession. Nixon, however, refused to employ him in this capacity, but rather directed him to survey the Euphrates River and Hammar Lake for future civil works there. Buchanan objected that he did not think India had despatched him for such menial duties, but Nixon would not relent. Nixon went as far as to tell Buchanan 'He did not understand [the] title of the appointment as there was no port to administer.' The Commission pointed out to Nixon 'that here is a condition of the port which you yourself describe I think as unsatisfactory and that when the best assistance available is sent, instead of being availed of it is deliberately put aside.'[1] Nixon explained to the Commission that he did not think it wise to place a civilian in charge of a military operation as he would clash with naval and marine personnel. He did not realise, he admitted when the Commission pointed it out, that Director-General was a military title second only to Commander-in-Chief.

As poor as the port facilities of Basra were, they were sufficient to amass, by late 1915, an adequate stock of the necessities for fighting in Mesopotamia. As Duff told Hardinge in February 1916, everything dealing with supplies and medical stores was sufficient as far as Basra, 'wherever . . . we control matters directly.' This was perhaps an unconscious admission that beyond Basra their control was non-existent, although their responsibility extended as far as the front lines. It was, of course, the supply situation past Basra that became the chief criticism of the campaign.

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 12152.

The River Transport

Sir George Buchanan's comment on first inspecting the base at Basra was: 'I came to the conclusion that I had never before in my life seen such a hopeless mess and muddle.'[1] He must have made this comment prior to any knowledge of the transport situation on the Tigris, where it was far worse. He soon became aware of it, however, and his observation on the supply problem was so simple and basic as to make one wonder why no one else grasped it. He stated the problem as follows: '(a) the requirements of the army at the front in tons per day, delivered where required. . .; (b) the tonnage capacity of the river fleet and number of vessels available for all purposes; and if (a) exceeded (b) something unpleasant was bound to happen.'[2] Unpleasant things did happen, both strategically and on a more human level. David Lloyd George later wrote that it 'seems almost certain that, but for the shortage of river transport, the Turkish Army would have been destroyed between Amara and Ctesiphon.'[3] The same lack of river craft that kept Townshend from exploiting his victory at Kut in September 1915 forced him to wait six weeks for ample supplies to be gathered before marching on, time which was not wasted by the Turks in strengthening their Ctesiphon position. The equally slow concentration of forces severely handicapped the efforts to relieve Kut. As MacMunn observed, 'It should be written in letters of fire before every War Cabinet and before every General Staff. He who wills the ends must will the means.'[4]

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[1] Buchanan, p. 51.

[2] Ibid., p. 62.

[3] David Lloyd George, War Memoirs, (London, 1933), vol. 2, p. 814.

[4] MacMunn, p. 219.

The amount of supplies that was actually being sent up-river is open to debate, but all agree that it was too little. MacMunn said that in mid-1916 the British front lines were receiving 250 tons a day.[1] Colonel F. C. Fulton, Director of Supply and Transport until June 1916, said that the basic ration supply for the troops on the Tigris amounted to 345 tons, 'while I believe I am correct in stating that the total average tonnage available for the conveyance of troops, S&T and ordnance supply, field park and telegraph stores, &c., worked out to very little more than that required for feeding the force.'[2] Major-General Davison, Inspector-General from April 1915 to April 1916, told the Commission that when the 6th and 12th Divisions were the only forces in Mesopotamia, the carrying capacity of the river fleet was 600 tons and that that barely met the army's needs. By the time the other divisions arrived, 'We required 12,000 tons but we actually received up to March 10th 1,760 tons. Obviously it was impossible to move this great force to the front rapidly and to keep it properly supplied.'[3] It should be noted that by this time, eight extra steamers had arrived from India and Egypt, but the needs of the front-line troops were still far from being met.

Before exploring the attempts to increase the river fleet during 1915,it is important to point out that the only really viable method of transport available was by river. The trip from Basra to Amara was three and a half days by steamer, plus another day to Ali Gharbi. The same distances overland were covered by marches of ten and fourteen days

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[1]MacMunn, p. 265.

[2]Meso Comm, Fulton, 5 Dec 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Davison, 28 Nov 16, statement.

respectively, and there was no railroad or motor transport during that time. There was no road as such, and the land along the river was subject to flooding and the tributaries of the Tigris were, at best, only crudely bridged.[1] Further, since it was virtually impossible to carry out operations except near the river, owing to the lack of potable water elsewhere, the Tigris served as the handiest line of communication, even with its meandering course and difficult currents.

From the very beginning of the campaign it was not unknown to the commander of Force 'D' that dependence on the river was a difficult task. Commander A. Hamilton of the Royal Indian Marine was with Barrett from the start, and he had been with a party that had surveyed the Basra-to-Baghdad river route in 1905-07. He told Barrett, when Basra fell in November 1914, just what type of ships were necessary to meet the special conditions of the Tigris, and recommended that he order twelve such craft. As was the case with Buchanan, expert knowledge was ignored. When extra steamers were ordered, Hamilton testified that they 'were not really suitable, but we managed fairly well with them.' He further told the Commission that it 'would have been easy for me to have ordered any number of vessels at the outset had anyone known what the extent of the operations and the ultimate force would be. They were evidently not wanted; moreover, the attitude was one of cautious economy.' (This was not the last time that lack of official policy and frugal economy would be censured.) Hamilton summed up the entire river transport trouble in one line: '. . . unless it had been foreseen on the day Basra fell what the extent of the campaign was to be, no .

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[1] Moberly, vol. 2, p. 190.

subsequent effort would have averted the trouble that has been experienced, owing to the time required to produce such a river fleet.'[1]

Nixon testified that he never stopped asking for ships from the first month he arrived in Mesopotamia, and that his requests followed those of Barrett, which were despatched on 4 January, 1, 17 and 26 February 1915. By late May, at the time of the advance on Amara, Nixon informed India that the fleet at his disposal, seven paddlers and four tugs, were of too deep a draught to operate on the Tigris while it was in its low stage.[2] This is an important point that never seemed to be fully considered in India. At its lowest stage, the Tigris can only be navigated by a craft drawing no more than three and a half feet. Barrett and Nixon both made this clear, and even recommended the use of ships then employed on the Irrawaddy in Burma. Such boats were available, but 'no one was man enough to commandeer them in any numbers.'[3] Rather, the Indian Government pressed the India Office for help; they said that they thought the rental fee asked for available boats in India was excessive, and they entered into negotiation with the various Indian companies rather than commandeer them outright.[4] The India Office replied that the Admiralty would provide twelve gunboats if they could be erected at Abadan and fitted out for operations in Basra.[5] Although the gunboats were necessary for military operations, they were hardly sufficient to aid the transport line.

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[1]Meso Comm, Hamilton, 26 Oct 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 12018.

[3]MacMunn, p. 233.

[4]Tel. no. M14709, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 28 Apr 15, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

[5]Tel. no. M15664, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 6 May 15, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

When the India Office finally agreed to provide the ships, it proved to be an arduous undertaking. After Nasiriyah fell and Nixon began to look ahead toward Kut, he asked again, in late July, for more ships. The India Office answered that such ships as he required were not procurable and had to be built. Nixon asked that six paddle-steamers, three stern-wheelers, eight tugs and forty-three barges be built in England to specifications given by Lynch Brothers, who operated the pre-war river service and had offices in London.[1] As Lake commented, the 'India Office had the telegram on the 2nd or 3rd August, and as far as anybody in India knew, they gave the necessary orders.'[2] However, that was far from being true, as the orders became submerged in red tape. First, the Director-General of Stores at the India Office passed the request to the Admiralty, who in turn considered the order excessive and asked that Nixon be referred to in order to confirm the proposed number. Nixon's reply arrived on 17 September. On that date the India Office began negotiations with Lynch Brothers, who agreed to contract for only half the required number of ships. By the time the plans were drawn up and tenders submitted for the orders, it was 3 November before all the ships were contracted for.[3] The Viceroy was immediately contacted and informed that the ships, ordered as far back as 7 July, could not be delivered until March 1916 at the earliest.[4] This report came in the midst of preparations for the advance on Baghdad, a time when the need for shipping was critical, yet it made absolutely

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[1]Tel. no.number, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 4 Aug 15, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

[2]Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18658.

[3]Meso Comm, Collier, 19 Oct 16, statement.

[4]Tel. no. M37512, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 3 Nov 15, IO/L/MIL/3/2528.

no change in the arrangements for the advance.

The following is an account of the number of ships ordered and delivered to Mesopotamia in 1915. On its arrival in November 1914, Force 'D' had no river transport at all, but quickly commandeered the three Lynch Brothers steamers that the Turks had not removed or sunk. On 4 January Barrett requested seven steamers and one or two lighters; these were delivered between 22 April and 19 May. On 17 February, Barrett ordered four launches and four tugs, which arrived in mid-May. Nixon ordered six launches and six tugs on 27 May, but the Indian Government told him that they were not obtainable. On 8 July he ordered six more launches; five of them arrived in October, one in December. He made further orders on 19 and 28 July, 2 September, 9 and 24 October, none of which arrived before February 1916.[1] Davison testified that by July 1915 Force 'D' was employing four Lynch steamers, nine paddle-boats, and seven tugs. He noted that this 'flotilla, supplemented by mahelas, was barely adequate for the needs of two divisions. It was just enough to provide for the minor movement of troops and the conveyance of stores, but not for big strategic moves.'[2] General Cowper stated that by the end of 1915, they were equipped with thirteen paddle-boats, three stern-wheelers, nine tugs and three screw boats, the last of which were useless against the Tigris current.[3]

Thus, a fleet barely able to handle the absolute minimum of

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[1]Meso Comm, 'History of the Supply of River Craft to Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' for General Transport Purposes from the Commencement of Operations up to June 1916', p. 9, Appendix unnumbered.

[2]Meso Comm, Davison, 28 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, statement of available river craft, App. 39d.

operations on the Tigris was swamped by the influx of two divisions from France and one from India in the three months after Ctesiphon. To make matters worse, those ships that had worked non-stop for months were on the verge of collapse. Just as reinforcements began to arrive, Nixon told Hardinge that more than half of his existing craft would have to undergo major overhaul immediately, 'failing which they will have to be scrapped.'[1] He therefore needed, in addition to the orders he had placed in July through October, seventeen paddle-steamers, twenty-four stern-wheelers, eleven tugs, two launches, sixty-four barges and six oil barges. By 13 February 1916, Force 'D' had received only three paddle-boats, two stern-wheelers, one small up-river tug, two motor lighters, sixteen barges and one oil barge. Lake told Robertson that the necessity of keeping the new division supplied with food and ammunition 'often made it quite impossible to despatch other auxiliary essentials such as aircraft barges, bridging material, medical personnel and material.'[2]

Given the fact that the number of transport ships was too few, the question arises as to who was responsible for their provision. Barrow testified that the blame did not lie with the India Office because prior to 20 August 1915 'no question had been raised about the shortage of transport. . . . we did not regard it as our business.'[3] Barrow stated that he believed Nixon had not sufficiently considered the provisioning of his force. Nixon naturally denied this. He stated that it was

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[1]Tel. no. M44524, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 17 Dec 15, IO/L/MIL/3/2508.

[2]Tel. no. 30884, Lake to Robertson, 13 Feb 16, FO/371/2771/30884.

[3]Meso Comm, Barrow, 21 Aug 16, nos. 561-62.

impossible not to be aware of the transport situation because it was so faulty. He in turn blamed India. 'It was the omission to supply more river transport--a circumstance beyond our control--that entailed such avoidable sufferings on the troops.'[1] The Commission suggested in return that Nixon did not give the authorities sufficient advance warning of his transport needs and thus they were unavailable for the operations toward Baghdad in November 1915, when they were most sorely needed. Nixon responded that he had no idea how long it would take for India to meet his requests, but his orders for shipping were for the transport of sick and wounded rather than for the Baghdad advance, of which he knew nothing in July.[2]

This leads to an important question, and one which Nixon failed to answer as straightforwardly as he might have done. The Commission asked him why, when he knew that the transport conditions were totally inadequate to deal with an active force going into battle, did he advance on Baghdad? This is a point which most incriminates Nixon for the carnage during and after Ctesiphon, and throughout the entire summer campaign of 1915. Since Crewe and Chamberlain had both urged a cautious policy in Mesopotamia, 'a safe game', why did Nixon recommend advances time and again (Amara, Nasiriyah, Kut, Baghdad) when they not only contradicted official policy, such as it was, but they also were so poorly equipped? The troops had to exist on a minimum of provision in climatic conditions that compounded the troubles Force 'D' was facing. If Nixon was really concerned with the welfare of his troops, if

[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 12039.

the shortage of supplies was always on his mind (as he testified it was), then common sense as well as military doctrine and official policy dictated that he should not advance without a functioning and secure line of supply. Nixon's answer was: 'We had these troops up there and we were going on fighting.'[1] This makes it quite difficult to agree with Nixon's statement that he 'was no fire-eater.'

If Nixon's sole duty was to give battle, then such matters as logistics should have been handled by another agency, and Nixon blamed his lack of supply ships on the Royal Indian Marine and the Indian Government. He claimed 'It was the duty of India to ask and find out what was required for the force and not to impose the intolerable burden on me of having to continually fight to obtain a necessary supply.'[2] Thus, it was the duty of the Royal Indian Marine to deliver the shipping to Mesopotamia, and Nixon found that their 'methods of supplying them are criminally dilatory.' Major-General Gorringe supported Nixon on this. He claimed that the Indian Marine personnel lacked the experience to cope with the difficult conditions on the Tigris, yet they did not take advantage of the 'experienced staff of the Indian river steamship lines, who had the necessary experience in peace; the failure of the responsible authorities to mobilise these resources of river experienced officials was, in my opinion, a fatal omission.'[3] To make matters worse, the Indian Marine officials in Mesopotamia who sent to India for craft of certain specifications, could not be sure that their superiors in

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11565.

[2]Ibid., statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Gorringe, 12 Sep 16, statement.

India would meet their requests. Nixon testified that after repeated warnings that only paddle-steamers were capable of sailing against the swift current of the Tigris, the R.I.M. authorities in India still attempted to get the Mesopotamian supply force to accept screw-driven ships, which proved too weak to operate on the river.[1]

As well as the Royal Indian Marine, Nixon also accused the authorities higher in the Government of not supporting him. He claimed his demands for transport 'were treated in a perfunctory manner', and that 'it was the duty of India in the first place to foresee and furnish, and in the second place to meet the demands for them when made from the field.' To support this claim, Nixon quoted from the Field Service Regulations, part 2, section 5, paragraph 2, which lays the responsibility for supplying the requisite forces on the Government, and section 22, paragraphs 2 and 3, which defines the responsibility of the directors of the administrative forces. Therefore, Nixon averred, the blame was not his. 'Every effort made by me to obtain river craft was thwarted by higher authority, and my demands were played with.'[2]

Sir Beauchamp Duff was 'fully cognisant of the shortage,'[3] and said that from the outset he attempted to ascertain the needs of the force. To prove this he cited communication with Barrett.[4] Lake testified that when he became G.O.C., Duff told him to estimate the needs according to the number of ships necessary to meet the conditions of 'rations,

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 12243.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 14 Dec 16, no. 15968.

[4]Ibid., no. 15950.

hospital, equipments, and all that sort of thing.'[1] Lake believed that no one ever asked for Nixon to give such an estimate, because he had no increase in his force. Surgeon-General J. G. MacNeese related that the transport situation 'was frequently discussed at the Commander-in-Chief's conferences, and the impression left in my mind was that the GOC Force 'D' was responsible for making the best use he could of all transport available in Mesopotamia,' and that he could apply for anything he might require.[2] Duff testified that 'we were spending our time trying to get all we could.'[3]

It is difficult to state with certainty how hard the Indian authorities tried to obtain river craft. General Cowper testified that the civil companies in India were unwilling to cooperate with the Government. He claimed 'civilian India did not recognise that we were at war. . . . They would not give way in the slightest.'[4] It seems that the Government also did not recognise the imminent danger. If India had been placed on a war footing, why did the authorities not commandeer what was necessary to meet the emergency? Did they, like Barrow with the volunteer battalions, not want to 'interfere with their vocations in civil life very much'? The evidence given by representatives of various Indian companies implies that the Indian authorities rarely approached them for help. F. Carter, of Turner, Morrison & Company, a mercantile firm in Calcutta and Bombay, testified that his company, as well as others in Calcutta, could easily have constructed ships to

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[1]Meso Comm, Lake, 11 Jan 17, no. 18675.

[2]Meso Comm, MacNeese, 12 Oct 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Duff, 14 Dec 16, no. 15698.

[4]Meso Comm, Cowper, 18 Jan 17, no. 19427.

meet the needs of Force 'D' had they been asked. 'A plan for a motor boat suitable for the rivers was made and an estimate drawn up by us which was placed before Government, but we were told that it was not required and that Government were providing all necessaries of this description.'[1] H. P. King, of Associated Brass and Copper Manufacturers of Great Britain, who was the company's agent in the Far East, told the Commission that a large number of suitable river steamers were available in Hong Kong, plying the river north to mainland China. He informed the India Office of this by letter and in person, and was at first sufficiently encouraged to offer his services free of charge to negotiate for the craft. He began enquiries at his own expense and was prepared to carry through with the preparations, but he heard no more from the India Office. King stated that he did all of this upon hearing 'Mr. Chamberlain's statement in the House of Commons that the India Office had scoured the world for suitable vessels.'[2]

Sir Robert Carlyle, of the India Council, and chief of the Department of Revenue, told the Commission that he 'never heard whether any steps were taken . . . to get boats from India and use them in Mesopotamia on the rivers.'[3] However, Lord Inchcape, of the P&O shipping lines and the British India Company, stated that their workshops in Calcutta were employed by the Indian Government in altering river craft and fitting out hospital and transport ships, and building barges. In the year ending 31 July 1916, the P&O dock in Bombay reported that they had done 'a great deal of work' fitting out river craft, transports and hospital

[1]Meso Comm, Carter, 28 Nov 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, King, 28 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Carlyle, 28 Sep 16, no. 4672.

ships, Further, the two companies had had a total of seventy-six steam vessels, barges and launches impressed by the Government (thirty of which were lost in transit). However, of those ships, only nine barges had been impressed prior to December 1915.[1]

This is the most salient point: most of the ships impressed or fitted out were done so only after Ctesiphon. This is best shown by a statement to the Commission by A. Simpson, senior partner of a company owning four navigation and railway companies in India. He stated that one of his firms, India General, was approached in January 1915 for the impressment of two steamers, but they were informed a month later that the ships were to be procured elsewhere. He listed the number of vessels and when they were commandeered from his companies: in March 1915, four steamers; in August, two steamers and one barge; in September, one steamer; in October, four steamers; in November one steamer. However in December 1915, after having impressed a total of thirteen vessels in nine months ('spending our time trying to get all we could' as Duff testified), the Indian Government commandeered twenty-four steamers and six barges.[2] This point is further shown by the arrival in Basra on 4 March 1916 of ten steamers after a 4000 mile voyage from the upper Nile,[3] although in February of the previous year Sir Henry McMahon, Chief Commissioner in Egypt, had offered two stern-wheelers.[4] River boats able to navigate the upper Nile would have been suitable for the Tigris, but India did not press for any.

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[1]Meso Comm, Inchcape, 3 Jan 17, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Simpson, 30 Nov 16, statement.

[3]Letter, McMahon to FO, 9 Jun 16, FO/371/2771/110971.

[4]Letter, McMahon to FO, 19 Feb 15, FO/371/2482/19924.

The Medical Situation

In his memoirs, David Lloyd George stated that 'if the neglect by the military authorities was directly responsible for the failure and defeat of the expedition, their neglect of the medical equipment turned disaster into horror.'[1] It was bad enough that the 6th Division had been defeated before Baghdad and then was lost at Kut, but the conditions of the sick and wounded made the débâcle worse still. The shortcomings of the medical facilities were brought about not only by the lack of transport for shipping medical supplies to the front, but also by the shortage of medical personnel and equipment. The reports of the Vincent-Bingley and Mesopotamia Commissions showed 'that the expedition was systematically starved by the Indian military authorities in regard to every vital medical provision.'[2] As Chamberlain wrote, 'the conditions have been awful, and quite inexcusably awful.'[3]

Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Director of Medical Services in India, Surgeon-General Sir William Babtie, attempted to introduce a plan for reorganising the Indian Army medical system, to bring its personnel to full strength and provide them with better wages. The Army was not prepared for overseas expeditions when the war started, and volunteers for such forces were not numerous. Babtie reported that the medical service in general was understaffed 'but for services outside India these deficiencies were increased in respect to the reserve of civil subassistant surgeons of whom over 350 who would have been available for military service inside India could not be compelled to

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[1] D. Lloyd George, vol. 2, p. 816.

[2] Ibid., p. 817.

[3] Letter, Chamberlain to Balfour, 25 Feb 16, Balfour papers, British Museum, Vol. LIV, no. 49736.

serve oversea', not even with the inducement of double pay.[1] Other understaffed sections included the Army Bearer Corps and labour for the medical units and Supply and Transport Corps, who again were not inclined to enlist for foreign duty. Thus, as each expedition was sent overseas, the next expedition was left with a less experienced staff. Sir Havelock Charles, Medical Adviser to the Secretary of State for India, testified that India was asked 'to send the best that she had got to France, and she sent the best to France; she sent the second best to Egypt, . . . third best to East Africa, . . . then whatever remained, the dregs,to Mesopotamia.'[2] When the 6th Division left for Mesopotamia in late 1914, the following were mobilised: five field ambulances, for 500 patients; one clearing hospital, 200 patients; one stationary hospital, 200 patients; two general hospitals, 850 beds; one X-ray section; one medical stores depot; and seventy-one medical officers.[3]

These arrangements sufficed as long as wounded were few and not too many soldiers succumbed to the appalling climate. As distances in Mesopotamia are great, it was impossible for the hospitals to move very often or very far, so the wounded had to travel quite far to be treated, which was not too great a hardship provided that transport was available and medical officers were able to tend the wounded along the way. When the wounded from Ctesiphon were evacuated, the most forward hospital was Amara, and many were taken as far as Basra, almost 500 miles away. As with the transport situation, London was equally ignorant of these medical arrangements. In late October 1915, Chamberlain announced

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[1]Meso Comm, Babtie, 13 Oct 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Charles, 28 Sep 16, no. 4825.

[3]Letter, Babtie to Maxwell, GOC Egypt, 12 Oct 14, HDG/88/1/327.

in Parliament that while he did not know the exact details of the situation, 'there is a well-equipped general hospital at Basra and other hospitals have been established at various points in the sphere of operations. . . . The Government of India are well aware of the importance we attach to making the best arrangements possible.'[1] Chamberlain could easily believe such to be the case, because since the war began the India Office had only once been asked for medical supplies.[2] The Indian authorities were not quite so confident. Hardinge wrote in late November 1915, 'I am afraid our hospitals in Mesopotamia leave much to be desired. . . . The great difficulty is to evacuate the wounded from the front to the base which is so far distant, and which can only be done by river, while river transport is very small.'[3] Hardinge looked to the occupation of Baghdad as the answer to all the problems, as did most of the medical personnel of Force 'D'.

Hardinge's statement proves that the Indian Government was aware of the difficulties in Mesopotamia before the advance on Baghdad, yet Duff testified that it was Nixon's 'failure and that of those serving under his orders to bring to notice defects in organisation which could not be fully appreciated' by either London or Simla.[4] Nixon responded with the requests that he had made continually for shipping. The Vincent-Bingley Report stated that the 'demands of the force in regard to personnel, particularly hospital staff, was frequently put before the

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[1]Meso Comm, Questions &c. in Parliament, 27 Oct 15, CAB/19/8, Appendix unnumbered.

[2]Report to the Meso Comm on Stores, Section 1, CRW/M/15/3.

[3]Letter, Hardinge to Sir Wm. Lawrence, 25 Nov 15, HDG/103/2/1517.

[4]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 12218.

authorities in India from an early period in 1915.'[1] Additional officers were despatched in June 1915, but they did not meet the number required by the Deputy-Director of Medical Services in Mesopotamia, Surgeon-General G. H. Hathaway. The reason more personnel were not sent was explained by Babtie: 'I was unable to do more than was absolutely necessary in Mesopotamia until the North-West Frontier and the internal security columns had been arranged for.'[2] The additional officers arrived only after Nixon 'represented that there would be a breakdown if conditions were not improved.'[3]

In spite of Nixon's warning, the medical staff was able to function fairly well until Ctesiphon. Prior to that time, 'we were dealing with small numbers, going short distances in fine weather, placing serious cases on stretchers and landing those unfit for travel further down the Tigris at Amara.'[4] To operate thus, the medical services had fitted out eight native mahelas as hospital craft, each able to hold about seventy-five patients. More craft were requested from India in June, August and December 1915. The battle at Ctesiphon changed everything. Basing their casualty estimates on the battle at Kut-al-Amara, in the previous September, the medical service estimated no more than 1,000 casualties. To evacuate these, two steamers were detailed, with mattresses, blankets, operating rooms, extra cooking facilities, latrines, and extra medical stores and rations. At the end of the day's fighting, it became clear that this was not enough. Five more steamers plus

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[1]Meso Comm, Hathaway, 10 Oct 16, statement.

[2]Meso Comm, Babtie, 13 Oct 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Hathaway, 10 Oct 16, statement.

[4]Ibid.

barges were added to the evacuation fleet, each with medical personnel, blankets, medical comforts and dressings, plus four days' rations. When every ship and barge was filled to capacity, 800 wounded remained after 3,000 were evacuated. No one had been prepared for such enormous numbers of casualties, and the wounded, who had to stay on board the overcrowded ships for at least a week,could only be tended by personnel prepared to cope with a quarter their number for half that time. Many were unable to move nor ever had a change of dressing, so the wounded were forced to lie for days in their own excrement, exposed to heat during the day, cold at night, frequent rain and constant Arab sniping.

One reason these conditions were so long in coming to the notice of anyone outside Mesopotamia was owing to a telegram India received on 7 December. Over Nixon's name was this message: 'Wounded satisfactorily disposed of. Many likely to recover in country comfortably placed in hospitals at Amara and Basra. . . . Medical arrangements under circumstances of considerable difficulty worked splendidly.'[1] It should be noted that Nixon had fallen ill in the midst of the Ctesiphon battle and had been evacuated on one of the overloaded steamers. Nixon testified that 'to the best of my recollection' he did not draft such a telegram. It was sent from the Adjutant-General's branch and Nixon assumed that it had been sent with his name but without his knowledge. 'Telegrams were sent in my name about ordinary business without my knowing it and it must be so where there are so many of them.'[2] Soon after this testimony, however, Nixon explained 'we did not intend to create

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[1]Barker, Neglected War, p. 137.

[2]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 11929.

any false impression; we did not know that it would be read out in the House of Commons or anything of that sort.'[1] Nixon said that he had been impressed with 'the resource and energy and sleepless toil of the medical officers and their unceasing efforts to alleviate the suffering of the wounded in the enormous difficulty of this evacuation, and the outstanding fact that the wounded had been brought down at all.'[2]

As stated earlier in regard to transport, if Nixon had been as concerned with the medical shortages, especially as they overlapped with the shipping problem, he could have easily called a halt to operations until the defects were remedied. Such a decision would hardly have been criticised by the Secretary of State, since he had urged caution all along. The Commission asked Nixon why he did not make greater efforts to bring outside attention to the problem. When making his appreciation of the Mesopotamian situation on 30 August, he had made no mention of any difficulties. 'That was purely a military appreciation,' he answered.[3] It did, however, give the General Staff the impression that his transport was sufficient. The Commission suggested that the poor medical situation had not been fully considered. 'But surely after sending repeatedly for supplies that did not come along you ought to have lost your temper and used strong language, and let them know that the limit of your forbearance had been reached.' Nixon, too used to the strict economy of pre-war India, could only reply 'I would have

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, no. 11938.

[2]Ibid., no. 11937.

[3]Meso Comm, Nixon 14 Nov 16, no. 11891.

used extremely violent language--if I had thought that I should have got something by it.'[1]

That Nixon did not try hard enough to meet the needs of his force is hinted at above, but he finally admitted that he was not fully aware of the problems. When offered ambulance boats and medical stores from the Red Cross, he never replied to the offers. On the one hand he explained that his staff handled most of the telegrams and screened those that reached him, yet on the other hand he testified that his Staff told him everything. Why then did he decline the Red Cross offers? 'The report then to me [in August 1915] was that what they had got was sufficient.'[2] This was some six weeks after he warned India about a potential breakdown of his medical service. Nixon told the Commission that if the medical service was short of supplies, it was the duty of the senior medical officer, Hathaway, to order it directly from India without consulting him. Nixon therefore assumed that since Hathaway made no complaints to him, then his requisitions were being met.[3] Nixon never read any telegrams from the Red Cross, and he heard no complaints from his Staff, so he claimed ignorance of the needs of the medical service. It would seem that until he was face to face with the medical deficiencies, during the evacuation from Ctesiphon, Nixon had little actual idea just how poorly equipped the medical branch was.

Nixon was justified in his criticisms of India, however. The Indian authorities seemed bent on proving that they could run the campaign

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11914.

[2]Ibid., no. 11937.

[3]Ibid., nos. 11841-61.

and were equally determined not to hint that they might not be doing everything possible. In August 1915 they refused an offer from the Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire to raise the money for medical supplies and personnel, just as they refused a Red Cross offer of motor launches in December 1915, after the Ctesiphon retreat.[1] Sir Robert Carlyle testified that Duff wanted to establish a committee to provide comforts for the troops in Mesopotamia, a splendid idea considering that in a country whose summer temperature reaches 120° and above, only two ice machines operated dependably, and they were both in Basra.[2] This committee was not formed, however, owing to an objection by Hardinge. Carlyle stated 'I never could understand what the real ground was. . . . What was said by the Viceroy was that everything that was necessary could be supplied by the military people. . . . it was not, I think, for the Viceroy to interfere in a matter like this with the Commander-in-Chief.'[3] There was a similar lack of responsibility among other members of the Government. Surgeon-General MacNeese almost resigned his post as Director of Medical Services in India when he could not persuade the Quartermaster-General to provide hospital ships for the Tigris.[4] Duff intervened to resolve the situation, but this is an example of why Hathaway remained desperate for hospital transport in Mesopotamia even after the disaster at Ctesiphon brought the weakness to light. It is easy to see why Lord Curzon was moved to comment 'I

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[1]Lloyd George, vol. 2, p. 822.

[2]Meso Comm, Hathaway, 10 Oct 16, nos. 5810-16.

[3]Meso Comm, Carlyle, 28 Sep 16, nos. 4609-16.

[4]Meso Comm, MacNeese, 12 Oct 16, statement.

regret to say that a more shocking exposure of official blundering and incompetence has not in my opinion been made, at any rate since the Crimean War.'[1]

Indian Government Actions and Responsibilities

From the time of Kitchener's occupation of the post of Commander-in-Chief, the control of the military section of the Government had been virtually consolidated in one post. Kitchener, in the years 1906-1910, joined together the positions of Commander-in-Chief and Military Member to the Council, creating a situation that united civilian and military functions. It was as if, in Britain, the posts of C.I.G.S. and the Secretary of State for War had been held by the same man. Thus, the person appointed to the position of Commander-in-Chief immediately had his work load and responsibility doubled. Matters were further complicated by the chain of command. As the Mesopotamia Commission stated,

> you have a military organisation under the control of the Home Government here and you have another big military organisation under the control of the Indian Government and then you have the India Office with a Military Department that cannot superintend a campaign but can give orders.[2]

To muddle the situation even further, the decisions concerning the campaign in Mesopotamia that emanated from India came from Hardinge and Duff only; they consulted with no one as to the conduct of the campaign.

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[1] The Commission learned from various members of the Council in India that nothing concerning Mesopotamia ever came under discussion.

[1] Goold, p. 944.

[2] Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15197.

Such silence was evident from the outset. Aylmer, then Adjutant-General in India, testified 'I remember perfectly well, when the Mesopotamia Expedition started, it was not mentioned at those meetings at all; it was kept a dead secret.'[1] Duff stated that it did not need to be discussed. 'You will remember it began in a very small way. It was quite a minor operation, like sending a company across the barrack square, when it first began.'[2] But even as the expedition expanded, it remained a secret from the Council. Sir William Clark, Department of Commerce, Industry and Railways, testified 'I have no recollection of the Council having been consulted at any stage of the Mesopotamian operations, nor do I remember that in the earlier stages, at any rate, we received any information of any importance on the subject.'[3] Aylmer stated that when the decision to advance on Baghdad was made, it was mentioned only in passing, and no discussion was elicited. Aylmer commented

> It was my impression at the time that His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief did not like my giving my opinion. . . . It was not a true statement when it was given out in Parliament that all the military authorities in India had concurred in the advisability of the advance.[4]

Sir Robert Carlyle agreed, but pointed out that under Section 8 of the India Councils Act, the Viceroy, as Governor-General, had the power to issue 'rules and orders for the more convenient transaction of business in the Council.' As an extension of this power, Section 19, Part V, gave him the power to decide if and when a case came before Council.

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[1]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, no. 17907.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14936.

[3]Meso Comm, Clark, 23 Nov 16, statement.

[4]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, statement.

'It will thus be seen that the Governor-General did not transgress the letter of the law by excluding the Council from participation in Mesopotamian affairs.'[1] Hardinge used this as justification when he testified. He claimed that since the expedition took place outside India, there was no obligation to consult the Council. After agreeing that he and Duff managed the campaign alone, he explained that he had not the time to consult the Council, a debatable reply. 'Most of the questions required very urgent replies',[2] he claimed. Carlyle testified that this consolidation of power in the hands of the Viceroy was part of a trend among previous holders of that position. Having served on the Councils of two Viceroys, Carlyle stated that under Lords Minto and Hardinge, there was little discussion, a change of practice from the time of Lord Curzon.[3] Carlyle said that on Hardinge's Council ' 'there is comparatively little collective responsibility.' The Council was more than a mere formality, he said, 'but I think it has a good deal diminished.'[4]

Thus, the prime responsibility for the decisions affecting the Mesopotamia campaign belong to Hardinge and Duff alone. Hardinge's decision to act on his own, while perhaps not a wise one, was at least his decision. Duff, however, owing to the organisation instituted by Kitchener, was forced to take on the increased duties of his position.[5]

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[1] Meso Comm, Carlyle, 28 Sep 16, statement.

[2] Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, no. 16890.

[3] Meso Comm, Carlyle, 28 Sep 16, nos. 4694-95.

[4] Ibid., no. 4563.

[5] P. Mason, A Matter of Honour, (London, 1974), pp. 392-401, contain an account of Kitchener's reorganisation and its implementation.

The consolidation of work in one place may have made for greater efficiency in Kitchener's time, but Kitchener was suited to the position and he held it in peacetime. When war came, and duties increased thereby, the combined workload became too much for one man. Chamberlain wrote

> My present opinion is . . . that the Indian system is wrong because it concentrates in one man the functions of the Secretary of State for War, Chief of the General Staff & CinC. of the forces & that an Archangel couldn't do the work--even if he were better supplied with staff.[1]

Barrow supported this attitude.

> One man is doing what was the work of about five. At the time I recollect there was a Commander-in-Chief, four Army Commanders or six, and there was the Military Member. Questions were dealt with by those six persons and their respective Departments and Staff and they are all concentrated now.[2]

Duff was not the man to handle all the responsibility. 'He was a desk soldier who was temperamentally incapable of devolving his work; his problems piled up on his shoulders and were altogether too much for one man, however able.'[3] The Military Member was responsible for 'provisions of stores and supplies which affected the state of preparation of the Army but are not primarily involved in the policy concerning its employment. In this matter, the Commander-in-Chief is solely responsible for advice to the Council.'[4] Thus Duff was forced to take responsibility for military policy, administration, command and efficiency.

Perhaps as an attempt to alleviate some of the pressures thrust

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[1] Letter, Chamberlain to Curzon, 31 Mar 16, IO/L/EUR.MSS./F112.163.

[2] Meso Comm, Barrow, 22 Aug 16, no. 1043.

[3] A. Rumbold, Watershed in India, 1914-1922, (London, 1979), p. 25.

[4] Memo by Hamilton Gordon, in letter, Haig to Asquith, 14 Sep 16, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Asquith MSS/II/30.

upon him when he accepted the post of Commander-in-Chief in early 1914, Duff whole-heartedly embraced the philosophy of economy that had been practised in India in the years prior to the war. A policy of retrenchment, after the reorganisations instituted by Kitchener, was directed by the India Office, and a study of Indian Government finances (the Nicholson Commission in 1913) agreed with this policy. The recommendations of this study, sent to India on 20 March 1914, directed the Indian military establishment not to spend any money on preparations for possible overseas expeditions. Alternative mobilisation schemes should be prepared for any such measures, but no finances should be allocated. Duff told the Commission that India was 'to contemplate what we could do with regard to sending troops abroad; but we were to spend no money. I think the point at present is rather one of expenditure on equipment.'[1] As the Commission pointed out, 'just about the time of this economy campaign the equipment of the Indian troops was improving and becoming more expensive.'[2] The India Office sanctioned this cut in expenditure at this key time of Indian improvement because 'the Government of India had never intended or been expected by London to prepare an army to meet a European power, particularly one operating outside its own frontiers.'[3] Mason writes in his work on the Indian Army that because the Indian peasantry was so poor, it 'was the policy of the Government to tax him as lightly as possible and it followed that to be careful with military resources was right for India; it was

[1] Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14856.

[2] Ibid., no. 14574.

[3] Goold, p. 923.

from Britain that a more generous foresight should have come.'[1]

This was further explained by J. B. Brunyate, Military Finance Secretary from 1907-12 and Government Financial Secretary since 1913. 'The formulation of new schemes was not encouraged, and the Financial Department fully availed itself of that right of preliminary criticism which sometimes tests the belief of the military authority in its own projects.'[2] This 'right of preliminary criticism' became the bane of all military men attempting to procure even the smallest items. Aylmer testified of his tenure as Adjutant-General that the primary difficulty in procuring anything for the military was 'the terrorism created by the Finance Department.' He described the result of this 'terrorism' thus: 'There is excess of criticism even in minute points. Trying to get anything through at Simla is like a man trying to struggle through quicksand or bog. He becomes exhausted by opposition on all sides and sinks.'[3] This atmosphere of strict economy created an attitude in all branches of the military that to ask for anything new was a waste of time, and the result was that all ranks did the best they could to subsist on what little was issued to them. The Vincent-Bingley Report summed up this attitude: (a) there is more merit in silence than in requests; (b) economy is more important than efficiency; (c) nothing new could be introduced without an equal saving elsewhere; and (d) even with the smallest request, one could expect it to be halved. The Report commented that 'a system of this nature will possibly be good and

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[1]Mason, pp. 410-11.

[2]Meso Comm, Brunyate, 17 Oct 16, statement.

[3]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, statement.

economical in peacetime but it is bound to break down in war.'[1]

When the war came, the system employed was so ingrained in Indian personnel that it did not sufficiently adapt to wartime necessities. Duff testified that even when Hardinge, on his visit to Mesopotamia in March 1915, offered the medical authorities there all the supplies they needed, they 'were slack in asking' for necessities.[2] Just as the troops were unused to making requests, so the Government departments were unused to fulfilling them. Aylmer claimed that although he had to submit ten times as many requisitions for the armies in action, the governmental machinery made no allowances. 'In my opinion a clear conception of what this war really meant did not exist in Simla. Throughout the autumn of 1914 it was an axiom that the war must come to an end before April 1915, and the Budget for 1915-1916 was to be a normal one.'[3] Brunyate of the Finance Department confirmed this. He quoted the military expenditure as: 1913-14, £21,266,000; 1914-15, £21,810,000; 1915-16, £23,216,000, a mere £1.4 million increase in order to help keep four expeditions in the field and maintain an interior defence.'[4] Duff testified that he personally suppressed many of Aylmer's proposals for Army improvement, and he defended the Finance Department's critical process. 'That has always been the system. There has been much less referring back since the war has been going on, but it was the old custom. . . . It is very often the fault of the Branch concerned in putting

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[1]Meso Comm, Babtie, 13 Oct 16, no. 7469.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, no. 14592.

[3]Meso Comm, Aylmer, 9 Jan 17, statement; Mason claims that this was at the direction of the Home Government, Mason, p. 411(fn.).

[4]Meso Comm, Brunyate, 17 Oct 16, statement.

forward their demands badly.'[1]

Thus, the unnecessary attention to detail within the Governmental bureaucracy, the lack of sympathy within the system for the needs of an army at war, and the prevalent attitude in the army that it was impossible to get necessary supplies and equipment made a bad situation worse in Mesopotamia. Soldiers brought up in such an atmosphere must have become inured to privation, and that may account for their outstanding fighting ability in the most difficult circumstances. It may also account for their use of a bare minimum of transport, since they must have assumed that the Government had again turned a deaf ear to their pleas, as had happened so often in the past. Although Brunyate testified that 'there was no policy of refusing anything that there was no reason to regard as a prime military necessity',[2] testimony from both Government officials and field officers showed that everyone outside the department believed otherwise.

Although the 'system' can be blamed for creating an atmosphere in which poorly equipped armies had to struggle against both the enemy in front and the Government behind, it is those who refused to circumvent the system in order to meet dire necessities who must accept responsibility for the failures in Mesopotamia. In India, Hardinge and Duff, who controlled the policy and the conduct of the campaign, were the most culpable. One must agree with Goold's criticisms of Hardinge. He saw the campaign in Mesopotamia as the one bright spot in the entire war. It was the only really successful campaign in the first year of

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[1]Meso Comm, Duff, 5 Dec 16, nos. 14603-04.

[2]Meso Comm, Brunyate, 17 Oct 16, statement.

the war, and the only one India controlled. Hardinge therefore was easily persuaded by Nixon, by way of Duff's orders and his own offensive spirit, to expand the campaign. He was encouraged by the string of successes and the lack of criticism of the campaign from London, other than the occasional mild question from Crewe or Chamberlain. Hardinge's most costly mistake was the decision concerning the Baghdad advance. He so believed Nixon's estimates that he made no attempt to alter the plan of attack, even when he had knowledge of the poor medical and transport conditions and the impossibility of alleviating them prior to the advance. Goold states that 'Hardinge was certainly guilty of subordinating military to political considerations, a danger which he himself had warned against. . . . it must be emphasised that Lord Hardinge emerges as a man whose excessive optimism distorted his perspective.'[1]

Hardinge could possibly have been excused on the grounds of military naïveté, but such could hardly have been said of Duff. He could not have been less conscious than Hardinge of the poor state of the auxiliary services in Mesopotamia, and he should have been more aware of the probable consequences of the insufficiencies. His belief that India had done more than her share in fighting the war kept him from actively utilising India's resources of men, matériel and industry, and Force 'D' was correspondingly deprived. This awareness should have made him more receptive to the policy of caution urged by Crewe and Chamberlain, yet he consistently supported expansion. He explained that no definite policy ever came from the India Office, 'that there was no final objective laid down at all for this force.'[2] While no final

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[1]Goold, p. 937.

[2]Meso Comm, Duff, 7 Dec 16, no. 15171.

objective was stated, the general policy was; one of caution. Yet he ordered Nixon to establish control over the Basra Vilayet and to prepare plans for occupying Baghdad while he delayed the delivery of those orders to the India Office. Duff met with Nixon for only ten minutes prior to sending him to Mesopotamia, and told him nothing of the Secretary of State's attitudes.[1] Nixon, armed with Duff's orders to expand, pursued the policy avidly. Duff was therefore in a pivotal position in that he ordered Nixon to advance, yet he could explain these advances to Hardinge and Chamberlain as the decision of the 'man on the spot.' That he could initiate and support an extended offensive in a terrible climate with inadequate supply shows his incompetence as Commander-in-Chief. Perhaps the strain of too many duties overtaxed his powers of judgement, but the responsibility was his nonetheless. Again, the ultimate mistake was the decision to advance on Baghdad, and Duff finally admitted to the Commission that he had recommended the move with the knowledge that preparations were inadequate.

Given the fact that he was 'only following orders', Nixon might to an extent be excused from any responsibility in the Mesopotamian failures. As he told the Commission, 'The orders of the Cabinet and the Secretary of State were interpreted for me and sent to me through India. If they had a discussion with the Secretary of State it did not come to me.'[2] This is best shown in his surprise at being criticised for his late submission of plans for the advance north from Kurna, which he had sent to Duff much earlier; he had no idea that Duff's orders to

[1] Meso Comm, Nixon, 16 Nov 16, nos. 12090-92.

[2] Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11639.

him did not reach Chamberlain until early May 1915, six weeks after Nixon received them. His fault was gross overconfidence. Hardinge described Nixon's attitude toward Baghdad thus: 'It may be that by his miscalculation of the enemy forces opposed to him or by his misplaced contempt for their powers of resistance he made a serious mistake, but it is clear that he took a sporting chance and found the odds against him.'[1] Robertson, as C.I.G.S., took another view of this. He said that the advance on Baghdad was 'a risk for which there was no justification whatsoever. That such a transgression of elementary military principles should have been committed proves how hopelessly defective were the methods by which the war was then conducted.'[2] Although this statement deals mainly with the Government's decision, it is an accurate reflection of Nixon's part in the decision-making process.

War is no place for 'sporting chances', especially when one is ignorant of or indifferent to the odds. If Nixon's answer to Chamberlain that he could 'open the road to Baghdad' with one weak division had been a calculated response, then he could well have justified the risk. However, he consulted with no one, especially his field commander, and he consistently ignored intelligence reports about enemy strength when it did not suit his plans. By his own admission, he knew of the impossibly strained transport situation, but his belief that the Turks could not withstand British arms led him to overlook such details. 'I did not think and I do not think now the risk was any more than it had been

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[1]Meso Comm, Hardinge, 19 Dec 16, statement.

[2]Robertson, vol. 2, p. 51.

the whole time', he testified.[1] It is a naïve general that cannot conceive of his own defeat, but Nixon was convinced that Baghdad was his for the taking. Nixon was probably the most surprised man in Mesopotamia at the retreat of the 6th Division from Ctesiphon.

Nixon remained convinced that he had done his best under the circumstances, and that may be true; but he could have improved those circumstances and he did not do so. None of the operations that he directed were so pressing that they could not wait for the improvement of his supply line and medical facilities. If he had refused to move, claiming that those two factors in the expedition were the primary causes for his inability to advance, he could have forced their improvement, and thus increased his chance of success. As it was, he gained his successes in spite of his force's shortcomings, and this must have bolstered his confidence past the point of good judgement, and as a result his troops had to suffer the more. As he wrote in September 1915, 'The climate is bad, very bad, constantly & almost continually from 110° to 115° in the shade, 125° in a tent with the sides down & somewhere about 160° (sic) in the actual sun's rays, but the men have stuck it out splendidly & worked & marched & fought grandly all through.'[2] While his figures may be exaggerated to an extent, what he forced his troops to do 'in the actual sun's rays' makes one wonder if he was as concerned for his men as he claimed. Although Barrow testified that there was no reason for Force 'D' to conduct operations in such hot weather, Nixon tried to justify himself:

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, no. 11565.

[2]Letter, Nixon to G.A.Kempthorne, 20 Sep 15, IWM, Box 29, no. 528.

> That the summer was the season that the tasks set us had to be carried out was not of my choosing and I should be extremely sorry to think it possible for any soldier to conceive that our troops, whether white or coloured, should desire to make hot weather a pretext for not attempting to carry out the orders that they had received. Our Empire was not built in that manner, and, far from agreeing with Sir E. Barrow that the Force might without reproach have rested on its laurels with part of its work not done, I should have deemed myself liable to summary removal if I had refrained from attempting to do what I was told to do while troops were available for the purpose.[1]

This shows a remarkable lack of communication between the centres of command and operations.

Hardinge, Duff and Nixon must take chief responsibility for the disaster. They are the ones who directed the campaign to the defeats at Ctesiphon and Kut. Chamberlain would not or could not stop the course of events because he believed that the generals on the spot had the best available information, and they certainly were supposed to know how to act upon it. This, however, was a totally mistaken assumption, and shows Chamberlain to have been derelict in his duty as a policy-maker. Robertson goes so far as to blame him, and all the men in the Home Government, as the most responsible. He wrote that 'the chief cause of the trouble was a thoroughly bad system of High Command. This could only be remedied by the action of the Cabinet, and therefore the latter should be placed first and not last in order of responsibility for the consequences that ensued.'[2] Chamberlain should have exercised his authority and fulfilled his role as policy-maker, rather than allowing himself to be manipulated by the military.

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[1]Meso Comm, Nixon, 14 Nov 16, statement.

[2]Robertson, vol. 2, p. 65.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE COMMISSION'S REPORT

After nine months of accepting and considering testimony and written depositions from 100 witnesses, the Commission finished their investigation and, on 17 May 1917, submitted their report to the War Cabinet. The final report was signed by all the members of the Commission except Commander Josiah Wedgwood, MP, who submitted a separate report. The Commission's findings are summarised as follows:

1. The Mesopotamia campaign was justified as necessary, but required careful control.

2. The division of responsibility between the Secretary of State for India and the Indian Government was unworkable.

3. No overall strategy or definite goals were ever formulated.

4. Supply should have been controlled by authorities at the ports rather than from Indian Army Headquarters.

5. The Commander-in-Chief or his representatives should have made periodic visits to Mesopotamia in order to be familiar with the needs of the force.

6. All military operations prior to the Baghdad advance in November 1915 were justifiable as defensive necessities.

7. 'The advance to Baghdad under the conditions in October 1915, was an offensive movement based on political and military miscalculations, and attempted with tired and insufficient forces, and inadequate

preparation.'

8. Those responsible for 'this untoward advance' were, in order of priority, Nixon, Hardinge, Duff, Barrow and Chamberlain, plus the War Committee of the Cabinet.

9. Responsibility must be attributed to the political powers in London since they made decisions on the principle that they should decide military policy.[1]

The Report further criticised provision of supply, transport, reinforcement and medical stores, the morale of the troops, facets of Indian Government administration, and Nixon, Hathaway, Babtie and MacNeese. The Commission also submitted recommendations, calling for the improvement or reform of relations between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy and their Councils, the over-centralisation of the Indian military, the confusing and over-long chain of command, the Royal Indian Marine and the medical service.[2]

Josiah Wedgwood's minority report was submitted with the Commission's findings, and to an extent his criticisms are more pertinent. Wedgwood found that the blame placed on the Governmental authorities in England was misdirected, especially concerning the Baghdad advance. Given the information they had at hand in October 1915, they would have been more to blame if they had not sanctioned the move. 'It will be a bad day for our Empire when soldiers and statesmen decline all risk, and withdraw confidence from the men on the spot.'[3] He thought it

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[1]Meso Comm Report, CAB/19/26.

[2]Meso Comm Report, Recommendations, CAB/19/26.

[3]Meso Comm, Wedgwood's Report, CAB/19/26.

futile to censure Nixon for failure, without censuring every other senior Indian commander who had lost his job during the war. Wedgwood stated that the training of senior Indian officers was not up to standard, and therein was the problem. 'An administration that was content with this type of deficient training and selected generals to command in Mesopotamia, that knew them for what they were and yet let the expedition be run as 'nobody's child' must be held responsible for what happened in Mesopotamia.' He thus laid the blame on Hardinge and Duff, as well as the Indian system. He criticised their assumption of major control, their poor handling of the administration of the campaign, and their attitude of placing Indian requirements above the needs of England and the troops of Force 'D'.[1] He reported his findings thus:

> I find that, throughout the tenure of office of Lord Hardinge, the Government of India showed little desire to help and some desire actually to obstruct the successful prosecution of the war.
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> I find that the responsibility of the Mesopotamian failure of 1915-1916 rests principally on the Government of India, in that they gave ill-informed advice and did not throw themselves and the resources of India into the energetic conduct of the war.
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> I find that the Government of India consisted in fact of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, and the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Beauchamp Duff.
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> I find that no blame should be attributed to anyone, civil or military, in this country for the initiation, consideration, or sanction of the advance to Baghdad in 1915. I am equally convinced that the delay caused by the consideration of the advance in this country did not retard or adversely affect in any way the chances of that advance.
>
> I find that the advance to Baghdad failed because the transport was insufficient and the force ill-found.
>
> I find that the troops maintained the best traditions of the Service, that the generalship was fair, but that General Townshend alone inspired his men with that confidence and devotion without which victories such as the first battle

[1] Meso Comm, Wedgwood's Report, CAB/19/26.

for Kut and Ctesiphon are impossible.[1]

Wedgwood recommended that the War Office administer the Indian Army, that Indian officers undergo training of a higher quality, that censorship in the field be loosened, that seniority as a reason for promotion be removed and that the Government of India widen the scope of public activity in its functions.[2]

On 12 July 1917 the House of Commons began the three-day debate on the Report. The opening speaker was Attorney-General Sir Frederick Smith. He began the proceedings by suggesting that a tribunal should be formed according to the Military (Courts of Enquiry) Act of 1916 to pass judgement on those named in the Report as culpable. The main difficulty lay in the inability of courts under existing statutes to try both military men and civilians. Smith stated that a civilian could testify at a military court of enquiry only if protected from self-incrimination. Military witnesses were denied this, of course. Therefore, Smith argued, if a court-martial found a soldier innocent of the charges brought, but such actions did actually occur, then a civilian must be responsible, but could not be punished without an entirely new trial being started.[3] Smith's opening comments outlined a Governmental suggestion for a formal tribunal, yet the remainder of his excessively long speech dealt with arguments against any such proceedings, or indeed any action against those accused in the Report.

The Attorney-General pointed out that to try anyone on the basis

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[1]Meso Comm, Wedgwood's Report, CAB/19/26.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, p. 2172.

of the Report would be a miscarriage of justice. After all, the Special Commissions Act had guaranteed immunity from prosecution for the total surrender to the Commission of all requested documents. He said that to force the production of such information 'was a right proposal in the interests of justice' but, he continued, 'it is not, I say, right for us to turn round and say, "On that you shall be judged."'[1] Smith further argued that other elementary rights accorded by law were overlooked by the Commission, and this made any action against the accused unfair. He claimed that the witnesses 'left the box in many cases with no conception of the real and true case against them, and in one or two cases with no conception of the statute under which they were condemned, and in many cases, never having heard evidence of most weighty witnesses.'[2] Smith told the House that the basic rules of law, that the accused should be present throughout the trial, should be able to defend himself to those witnesses, and should be able to cross-examine witnesses against him, were all denied to the those before the Commission. His arguments against any legal action were in marked contrast to Asquith's statement to Parliament a year earlier, when the Special Commissions Bill was passed. Asquith commented then that the Government did 'not desire that the operation of the Clause [giving indemnity] should be such as to exclude from subsequent investigation, and it may be punishment, anybody who is shown to be responsible for what has happened.'[3]

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, p. 2160.

[2]Ibid., p. 2163.

[3]Hansard, vol. LXXXIV, 26 Jul 16, p. 1728.

The Commission members in the House were quick to answer the Attorney-General's condemnation of their lack of legal procedure. Wedgwood interrupted Smith's speech to remind him that the Commission was not a court of law and was not acting upon any given charges, so they therefore were not obliged to follow the rules practised by a court. Lord Hugh Cecil, in his speech to the Members, reminded them of the special powers granted to the Commission by the Act which formed it, powers which overrode rights against self-incrimination either through verbal testimony of the forced production of documents. 'The only powers that were added to these powers of enquiry were, in the view of the Commission, given to them to get over any difficulty which might arise incidentally and which might be an obstacle to their arriving at the truth.'[1] Sir Archibald Williamson spoke on the second day of the debate. He told the House that the Commission had no charge before it; indeed, its function was to investigate to see if there were charges to be brought. As to the rights of the 'accused', there were no accused since there were no charges. As to the right of cross-examination and legal defence, the Commission had been given the power to grant any witness legal counsel if it seemed that any injustice might be done. It was, however, virtually impossible to grant such counsel to every witness. (None had legal assistance and there is no record that any witnesses requested such.) 'It is inconceivable that all these witnesses could come to make their statements accompanied by lawyers, and that the exact proceedings of a Court of law could have taken place in

[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2180-81.

this Commission. I am perfectly certain that the House of Commons, when appointing the Commission, never dreamt of appointing a Court of law.'[1]

Williamson further stated that the major witnesses--Nixon, Babtie, Hathaway, and MacNeese--'had all the evidence which appeared to be relevant supplied to them' before their appearance in the witness box. Duff and Chamberlain, he continued, 'were both supplied with the whole of the evidence as and when it came out.'[2] Lord George Hamilton, the Commission chairman, later wrote, 'Each man told his story, and each man left the Commission with a certain knowledge of the points upon which the Commission considered his statement weak or strong.'[3] Attorney-General Smith's speech decrying the Commission's work was only the first attack upon it; others came from both the House and the Government.

Before any further discussion took place on the possibilities of dealing with the Report, however, Sir Austen Chamberlain spoke. He addressed the Members for an hour, explaining the course of events which led to the disaster at Ctesiphon and the failure to relieve Kut. He said little that was not common knowledge, and ended by praising all the officers and men in Mesopotamia and absolving them of any blame. That he took upon himself, and in doing so saw no other course than to tender his resignation. Almost every Member to speak thereafter voiced his dismay at the loss of Chamberlain's service to the Government, although many, even in their expressions of regret, congratulated him on his assumption of responsibility as Secretary of State and on his taking

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2311.

[2]Ibid., p. 2312.

[3]The Times (London), 16 Jul 17, p. 9.

the correct course. They felt, as The Times wrote the next day, 'that we regard his action as scrupulously proper and honourable to himself.'[1]

Immediately after Chamberlain's speech, the debate returned to not only the idea of a tribunal but also to renewed attacks on the Commission and its findings. Representatives of the Government seemed determined to discredit the Report and forgo any further action. Smith's opening speech had attacked the procedures followed by the Commission members; Balfour's speech, an impassioned defence of Hardinge, aimed at the members themselves. Balfour, using the Report's condemnation of the use of private telegrams to conduct official business between London and India, accused the Commissioners of condemning Hardinge over 'matters of relative triviality.' He stated that 'the criminals there are not Lord Hardinge or the Secretary of State for India. They are the Commission. Does anyone doubt that statement?'[2] Archibald Williamson responded in disbelief at such a reception of the Report. 'The Commission, indeed, finds itself in the position of a criminal in the dock rather than in the position of a body investigating and reporting upon occurrences at the request of the House.'[3] Ramsay Macdonald (Leicester, Lab.) defended the Commission soon thereafter, claiming that with 'the exercise of even a prejudiced imagination I cannot imagine [they] would be capable of producing a Report of such low value as some rt. hon. and hon. Gentlemen have tried to make out.'[4] Swift MacNeill

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[1] The Times (London), 13 Jul 17, p. 7.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2260-61.

[3] Ibid., 13 Jul 17, p. 2310.

[4] Ibid., p. 2340.

(S. Donegal, N) observed, 'The position of a Commission is a most ungrateful one unless they report in accordance with the wishes of the Government.'[1]

MacNeill's statement is a pertinent one. Was the Government criticising the Report because it, unlike the Dardanelles Commission Report, reflected unfavourably on the Government? Was MacNeill correct in stating that 'because they did not prophesy or report smooth things, the same fate has befallen them as has overtaken everyone who has been asked to report and has reported not . according to the wishes of the persons appointing them'?[2] Williamson told the House 'I regret that the Commission were unable to bring in a whitewashing Report. . . . It is unfortunate, and I very much regret, and I think we all regret, that we were unable to come to such conclusions.'[3] It seemed to others that the Government were attempting just such an action. Mr. Joseph King (N. Somerset, Lab.) said, 'This House seems to have resolved itself, for the time being, into a great whitewashing company. From the various parts of the House, with various reasons which have been alleged, with respect to various aspects of the Report or in regard to the eminent men concerned, there have been splashes, or let me say daubs of whitewash, put upon the Report and anything that might come out.'[4]

This attitude dealt not only with the attacks upon the Commission but also with the attempts at forming a tribunal to deal with those

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2334.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., pp. 2319-20.

[4]Ibid., 12 Jul 17, p. 2252.

accused. It seemed odd to many that such a tribunal was at all necessary. When this idea was relayed to the House of Lords, it was not greeted warmly. Lord Loreburn referred to the proposed tribunal 'first as a wet blanket and afterwards as a whitewashing commission. Similarly, Lord St. David criticised it on the ground that it had a shelving look, or at all events would have that appearance in the eyes of people outside.'[1] The question that these men brought forward was this: since the Commission investigation, after eight months and 100 witnesses, indicated guilt on the parts of some men involved, why did not Parliament act to deal with them directly? Why begin a separate court action to review the same material the Commission had delivered in order to judge those accused? As the Manchester Guardian commented, 'We confess that for the Government, after appointing a Commission, to appoint a Judicial Court of Enquiry strikes one as an evasion of its executive responsibility. . . . These charges are a matter for Executive or Parliamentary action.'[2] Admiral Lord Beresford wrote to The Times, 'Why did not the Government use their right as the Executive, after this finding, for punishing those found culpable? . . . all sorts of persons have been punished by the Executive Government for acts the Government thought were culpable--governors, magistrates, police officers, sailors, soldiers and civilians.'[3]

This reaction was given by several Members of Parliament. James Hogge (Edinburgh, L) claimed that a tribunal would be a waste of £100,000

[1] Manchester Guardian, 12 Jul 17, p. 5.

[2] Manchester Guardian, 13 Jul 17, p. 4.

[3] The Times (London), 17 Jul 17, p. 7.

to £250,000 of public money. 'It seems to me that the Government are the body who ought to take the decision; the Government, having had the Report of the Commission, ought to decide what they are going to do, and do it.'[1] Asquith also thought that the House of Commons was the only feasible body to handle the matter. 'To my mind it is obviously absurd, and even more than absurd, that you should submit to two or three judges or persons of judicial experience the question whether, in the conduct of a great war, this or that statesman or body of statesmen, this or that soldier or sailor, formed or acted upon mistaken judgement of policy.'[2] John Dillon (E. County Mayo, N) saw the tribunal as a way to remove the issue out of the way long enough for it to be forgotten. 'It was an attempt to humbug us into the belief that nothing had taken place.'[3] Sir John Jardine (Roxboroughshire, L) also believed the House of Commons the only logical body to administer justice. 'If we want to arraign these officers of State we can do it by discussion and by bringing forward Resolutions, and getting at them one by one. We are the great inquest of the nation.'[4]

David Lloyd George spoke to the House in favour of the tribunal, which would consist of one judge and one Member of Parliament, in accordance with the Military Act of 1916. He defended a judicial tribunal thus: 'In any profession if you turn a man out of his profession, it is a degradation, and no profession has ever done it without full

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, pp. 2350-51.

[2]Ibid., p. 2359.

[3]Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, p. 472.

[4]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2239-40.

judicial investigation beforehand, in which the person implicated has a full opportunity of obtaining a hearing and tendering his evidence.'[1] Lloyd George commented that if the proposed tribunal was unacceptable, then a special tribunal appointed from among the Members was fine with the Government. Although both types of tribunal were suggested by the Government, neither was put to the House for a vote. Rumbold states that

> the Government were wandering down the paths of expediency to satisfy a public cry for victims; and they were proposing to do so in a way which would have shuffled off their responsibility for the fate of individuals onto the uncertainties of a quasi-judicial tribunal with unclear terms of reference operating in the cloudy penumbra between law and policy.[2]

The debate moved away from the tribunal question to one of the guilt of those accused. In this more general discussion, Members voiced their opinions on whether anything should be done at all. Attorney-General Smith thought the Report was sufficient punishment for those concerned. 'The fact that there were no charges has not prevented verdicts of "guilty". I am sure the hon. and gallant Gentleman [Wedgwood] will not dispute it that the Report is simply a cemetery of reputations.'[3] Sir John Jardine supported the idea of doing nothing, as he found no crimes detailed in the Report. 'It is merely want of judgement, want of foresight, some of them getting old, some of them losing their requisite activity, and some of them losing their heads. . . .

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[1] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2370.

[2] Rumbold, p. 83.

[3] Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, p. 2162.

There is nothing that can be called high crime and nothing that can be called misdemeanor.'[1]

More Members thought the opposite, at least early in the debate. Sir J. D. Rees (E. Nottingham, U) observed 'I really think it is very difficult to hold any other conclusion than that it is of no use having great officers of State like the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, if, when things go wrong, they are not to be held responsible',[2] echoing Section 9 of the Report. Joseph King raised the point that there may have been crimes, but considering the offices held by those accused mere irresponsibility was damning enough. 'Have they proved capable, have they done their best, have they used the ability and imagination, the industry and courage, which we expected of them? I believe on those points these men stand convicted.'[3] Neither could their past records be used to excuse them. Ronald McNeill (St. Augustine, Kent,U) countered the argument of those who spoke in favour of the accused, especially Hardinge, when asking if their records, 'however eminent and distinguished, are to be brought forward as a sort of set-off by distinguished officers who in the hour of trial and national crisis, notwithstanding their past services, have broken down with results very disastrous to the country.'[4]

This argument of overall service negating any responsibility for the Mesopotamian disaster was used most frequently in defence of Hardinge.

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2238-39.

[2]Ibid., p. 2243.

[3]Ibid., p. 2255.

[4]Ibid., p. 2345.

Immediately after his tenure as Viceroy ended in April 1916, Hardinge returned to his position as Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In early July, some ten days prior to the Report being debated in the Commons, Hardinge spoke to the House of Lords. It was his maiden speech, and it created quite a furore for two reasons. First, being a permanent Civil Servant, Hardinge was not allowed to exercise his privileges as a peer during his tenure of office. Thus, in order for him to speak, the rule was waived in his favour by the Prime Minister. Second, his speech was a defence of his actions regarding Mesopotamia while he was Viceroy. 'He disclaimed any desire to shirk any responsibility which was his due, but it was not easy to know what other peremptory action he could have taken without exposing himself to the charge of excessive civilian interference in military matters.'[1] He also pointed out all of India's contributions as justification of his tenure of office. 'Excessive civilian interference' is a weak excuse for not exercising his authority when it was most needed. Many observers, both in Parliament and the press, were not impressed with his arguments. Swift MacNeill referred to the speech during the debate on the Report. 'No Peer--thank God, really, for it--has ever made a maiden speech in defence of himself and in sacrifice of his officials. His speech amounted to, "Please, sir, I did not do it; it was the other boy."'[2] The popular press also took Hardinge strongly to task. The Morning Post wrote: 'We note that Lord Hardinge in his defence--half a whine and half an attempt to shift the blame--

[1] The Times (London), 4 Jul 17, p. 7.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2336.

refers to other manifold labours with which his shoulders were loaded. . . . if his subordinates were to blame, he is responsible for his subordinates, because he either chose them or could replace them.'[1]

Other newspapers and Members of Parliament were easier on him. The Manchester Guardian, while commenting that Hardinge's speech, 'despite its length and comprehensiveness, failed to add much to the disclosures of the Report', also stated, 'In everything he did Lord Hardinge acted as an honest and conscientious trustee of the interests of India.'[2] The Daily Telegraph was also somewhat sympathetic toward him. Hardinge's speech 'was an apologia, of course; but it was the apologia of one who--rightly or wrongly--felt that he had been misjudged and did not hesitate to lay his case before his fellow-countrymen.'[3] E. S. Montagu (Cambridgeshire, L),soon to be Secretary of State for India, thought Hardinge a victim of circumstances, saying 'now he is censured by this document for what, for the fact that he relied too much upon those who had been chosen to give him military advice. Among many things we have never decided in this country are the relations between politicians and soldiers.'[4] E. G. Hemmerde (N.W.Norfolk, L) supported this view: 'I think it is absolutely correct to say that every single thing that Lord Hardinge did he did on information from people who he certainly had every right to trust.'[5]

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[1]Morning Post, 11 Jul 17, p. 6.

[2]Manchester Guardian, 4 Jul 17, pp. 4,5.

[3]Daily Telegraph, 4 Jul 17, p. 17.

[4]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, p. 2202.

[5]Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, p. 486.

Balfour, as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, defended Hardinge repeatedly on the grounds of his overall career. He came under heavy criticism when he refused to accept Hardinge's resignation after Chamberlain's had been tendered. Three times Hardinge submitted his resignation, and each time Balfour refused to accept it, 'the ground being that Lord Hardinge is an excellent permanent head of the Foreign Office. Therefore, even if he did not do his duty in India, in my opinion that is no reason at all for telling him that he is not to do something else that has nothing to do with India.'[1] Balfour blamed the House of Commons' inaction on the proposed tribunal as being the greatest detriment to Hardinge, who wanted an opportunity to present his case to an impartial tribunal so he could clear himself.[2] Balfour seemed to ignore the fact that Hardinge had already been given the opportunity to present his case, and that had been the cause of him being named by the Commission. Balfour remained adamant: 'So long as I am responsible for a Department I am not going to permit what I conceive to be a gross injustice being done to one of my subordinates.'[3] Criticism of Balfour's decision came from outside the House of Commons, also. Even those papers which had sympathised with Hardinge disagreed with Balfour. The Times called his reasons 'arguable, though in our opinion unsound.'[4] They did think, however, that Hardinge's repeated attempts set him 'beyond reproach in a matter of formal propriety.'[5] Lord George Hamilton's

[1] Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2259-60.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, pp. 505-06.

[3] Ibid., p. 497.

[4] The Times (London), 14 Jul 17, p. 7.

[5] The Times (London), 13 Jul 17, p. 7.

letter to The Times gave his opinions on the two resignations. 'If Parliament and the public will accept and adhere to this principle and make it a tradition of the political life of this country, the labours of the Mesopotamia Commission will not have been in vain.'[1]

Several Members of Parliament thought Hardinge's treatment preferential and compared it unfavourably with that of others accused in the Report, all of whom had been suspended from duty during the enquiry. W. C. Anderson (Attercliffe, Sheffield,Lab) called for equal treatment and for Balfour to accept the resignation, at least temporarily. 'We are not asking that people shall be brought to trial nor are we asking for punishments. We are asking that while these matters are cleared up that those concerned shall not retain their official positions.'[2] A. J. Sherwell (Huddersfield, L) also called for Hardinge's suspension until he was formally cleared, as any doubt of his abilities would surely be detrimental to his work. 'The real danger to the successful prosecution of the War is the danger of the loss of confidence of the country in the thoroughness, effectiveness, and response to the sense of responsibility on the part of those who are controlling the direction of the War.'[3]

As the debate proceeded, the idea of a tribunal grew less important, and the speeches began to move farther into generalities and questions of overall praise and blame. Although an occasional voice of reason emerged asking for a quick decision so the business of government could

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[1] The Times,(London), 16 Jul 17, p. 9.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, p. 483.

[3] Ibid., pp. 492-93.

proceed, such voices were lost in the crowd that grew increasingly hostile. As Balfour was being criticised over Hardinge's service, the Government as a whole were soon the target of many speeches. John Dillon saw in Balfour's refusal an attempt by the Government to circumvent 'the principle of Ministerial responsibility, and the only means by which we really in this House can hope to exercise any influence whatever over the Executive Government of this country.'[1] A more direct attack on this same theme came from J. M. Hogge: 'It seems to me that a great number of these people are going to get off, and going to get off very lightly. . . . the Government have harrowed the feelings of all right-thinking people by the incompetence with which they have dealt with this inconsequent muddle.' He expanded his argument, moving from those accused in the Report to everyone involved in the campaign in Mesopotamia. 'I would like to have seen the House of Commons take a clear issue as to whether, having got rid of some of the muddlers who took part in this Mesopotamia business, we should not now get rid of the others. The Prime Minister is responsible, in the last resort, for this muddle.'[2] Ramsay Macdonald took the Government to task for its lack of attention to the campaign, and blamed that for the failure of the Indian Army in Mesopotamia.

> They knew the strength of the Indian Army. They knew its organisation and its medical equipment, and if there is anybody supremely responsible, responsible in the last resort, for the way in which that Army took the field, for the variation of the plans placed before it, for the unconscious growth of its programme, for the indefinite object that again and again appeared only to disappear before

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[1] Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, pp. 468-69.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, pp. 2351-52.

its military commanders, the Home Government is pre-eminently responsible for the whole affair.[1]

The press also saw the opportunity of attacking the Government. The Times did so indirectly through its disapproval of that section of the Report which exonerated the advising Councils of blame, when they should have been more forceful in influencing events. 'They should never have submitted so weakly to be shorn of their attributes, and this contention relates more particularly to the Members of the Government of India, who tacitly abdicated their functions during the war.'[2] Less sophisticated papers were more open in their criticism, theorising that military experts were overruled by politicians, 'the real contrivers of the mischief.'[3] The Morning Post accused the Government of hampering the Indian Army by their appointments 'of Lord Hardinge and Sir Beauchamp Duff because they were weak, and of Sir William Meyer, because he suited their policy of starving the Army.'[4] Behind it all was Asquith, their villain of the piece. They saw the disaster before Baghdad as his fault, claiming he knew of the transport problem (which was utter nonsense) and that he overrode the military by 'the cunning manoeuvre of appointing an Inter-Departmental Committee.'[5] 'Therefore the chief lesson of this Report is that the blame goes back to the politicians. They had neglected our defences in peace; and in war, in their panic pressed the experts to "do something" and get success at

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[1] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2341.

[2] The Times (London), 2 Jul 17, p. 9.

[3] The Daily Mail, 28 Jun 17, p. 4.

[4] Morning Post, 29 Jun 17, p. 6.

[5] Morning Post, 4 Jul 17, p. 6.

all costs, without any due consideration of the military feasibility.'[1]

Such wild accusations in the press provoked a response from the Members of Parliament during the debate. It was the one thing in which there was general, if not total, agreement. Archibald Williamson defended the Commission's work and warned the assembly that they must take action on the Report if for no other reason than to make clear the real findings. He stated 'the conclusions of the Report and the conclusions of the newspapers are entirely and totally different. . . . The country are taking their impression of the Report from what they read in the newspapers, and it is well that it should go out from this House that it is not a correct version.'[2] Other Members were more blunt. Aubrey Herbert (S. Somerset, U) said he had 'rarely seen anything meaner than the perversion of that Report by the "Daily Mail" for its own purposes.'[3] Asquith agreed, saying 'the manner in which this report has been travestied, perverted and exploited, is one of the most scandalous chapters in the history of the degradation of the Press.'[4] Such indignation was not universal, however. William Joynson-Hicks (Brentford,U) thought that anything the press said was worth notice, because the newspapers 'have merely given evidence of what the public is thinking. The reason why we here must take notice of the views of the Press is because it is the only expression of public opinion at the present moment while we are under a Coalition Government.'[5]

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[1] Morning Post, 29 Jun 17, p. 6.

[2] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2314.

[3] Ibid., p. 2320.

[4] Ibid., pp. 2366-67.

[5] Hansard, vol. XCVI, 18 Jul 17, p. 493.

The House agreed on one thing other than a condemnation of the press: a condemnation of the Indian administrative system. When the Mesopotamia Commission submitted their Report, they added a list of recommendations, most of which dealt with improving the Indian administration. Archibald Williamson told the House that although their accusation in the Report of various individuals was serious, it meant little in comparison with what he hoped the Commission's work would bring about. 'That is what the Commissioners kept always before them, that they might leave behind them not alone a record of mismanagement and a record of blame, but might leave behind them a record that they found the condition of administration in India unsatisfactory.'[1] Wedgwood's observations supported this statement: 'It is that spirit illustrated by the bureaucracy in India during this war which is, to my mind, far and away the most serious question brought forward by the Report.'[2] When Chamberlain spoke to the House, he expressed the opinion that 'it would have been better if from the first the control exercised on behalf of His Majesty's Government had been vested in the General Staff or the Army Council'[3] rather than in the India Office. This was hardly an observation of hindsight, for he had written a memorandum a year earlier concerning a reorganisation of the Indian system, although he thought that the middle of the war was not the time to institute such a proposal.[4] Montagu, previously an Undersecretary at the India Office, criticised the Indian Government as 'too wooden, too iron,

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[1] Hansard, vol. XCV, 13 Jul 17, p. 2320.

[2] Ibid., p. 2378.

[3] Ibid., 12 Jul 17, p. 2212.

[4] Memo by Chamberlain, 14 Jul 16, in Cabinet minutes 11 Jul 16, CAB/42/16/5.

too inelastic, too antediluvian, to be of any use for the modern purposes we have in view.'[1] He was given the opportunity of acting upon his words when he was appointed to replace Chamberlain a few days later.

Indeed, the new men at the top, Lord Chelmsford as Viceroy, Charles Monro as Commander-in-Chief, and E. S. Montagu as Indian Secretary began work together to bring about reforms in the Government and Army in the immediate post-war period. That turned out to be the only real action taken after the submission of the Report. In the House of Commons the anger and threats of 12 and 13 July had cooled when the subject was returned to on the 18th, after a five-day period of seeing to other business. In the intervening days other matters had occupied the minds of the Members, so the concluding day of the debate saw the end of any real attempt to deal with the Report as it should have been handled. A few last-minute calls to remove Hardinge fell on deaf ears, and the Report went to the Army Council who were to deal with the soldiers accused. Since Chamberlain had left and no one could move Balfour to accept Hardinge's resignation, the civilians were no longer at issue. The tenor of the speeches on the 18th were an echo of Lloyd George's call to get the debate over with and get on with the war.[2]

The Army Council discussed the proposals for action throughout July 1917. On the 6th, they had directed the War Cabinet to prepare court-martial proceedings against Duff, Nixon, MacNeese, Babtie and Hathaway.[3] The next day they decided to give the accused the chance

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[1]Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2204-05.

[2]Ibid., 13 Jul 17, p. 2375.

[3]Army Council Meeting 216, 6 Jul 17, WO/163/22.

to defend themselves in a public enquiry. If a court-martial seemed in order, Section 161 of the Army (Courts of Enquiry) Act, 1916, would have to be waived, as this stated that no one could be tried after three years from the commission of an offence.[1] Only on 11 July did they realise that the evidence obtained by the Mesopotamia Commission was inadmissable, because Section 4 of the Special Commissions Act said that statements by any witness 'shall not be evidence against that person in any criminal proceeding (including a proceeding by Court-Martial) at any time thereafter instituted against him.'[2] By 19 July the idea of a court-martial had been dropped. Following the precedent of the South African War Stores Commission, the Army Council decided to elicit written explanations from the accused, and legal counsel would be provided for them to draft their statements if they so desired.[3] The explanations submitted by those accused are not on file, but the Army Council minutes recorded the reaction to the explanations. On 5 September 1917 Sir William Babtie's statement was accepted as satisfactory and no action was taken against him.[4] Surgeon-General Hathaway's statement was considered on 20 March 1918, and they decided that he should be called upon to retire. Surgeon-General MacNeese was that same day exonerated.[5] The Army Council, after considering Nixon's written explanation on 4 September 1918, also excused him.[6] Duff

[1] Army Council Meeting 217, 7 Jul 17, WO/163/22.
[2] Army Council Meeting 221, 11 Jul 17, WO/163/22.
[3] Army Council Meeting 224, 19 Jul 17, WO/163/22.
[4] Army Council Meeting 230, 5 Sep 17, WO/163/22.
[5] Army Council informal meeting, 20 Mar 18, WO/163/23.
[6] Army Council informal meeting, 4 Sep 18, WO/163/23.

apparently never replied.

When all is said and done, the after-effects of the Mesopotamia Commission were negligible. Chamberlain resigned as Secretary of State for India but was soon back in the Government as a Minister without portfolio in the War Cabinet, in April 1918. Duff, having left India for the purpose of testifying to the Commission, never returned to his post. He died in 1919. Hathaway was asked to retire, but none of the other military men suffered official sanction. Hardinge was never out of a job. Thus, only one of those accused for causing the failure and suffering in Mesopotamia faced any type of official retribution for their sins. Did the Commission then perform any real function? Briton Busch states that the report led to reforms instituted by Chelmsford, Montagu and Monro, but, as Chamberlain said in his July 1916 memorandum to the Cabinet, reorganisation of the Indian system was already being studied; it was strictly a matter of beginning it 'as soon as opportunity occurs.'[1] Was the Mesopotamia Commission nothing more than a colossal waste of time? Considering some of the criticisms levelled at it, one might think so. Many of the flaws noted, however, are unjustified or irrelevant.

Busch and Barker both point out the failure to observe normal rules of evidence.[2] This was dealt with by Wedgwood and Cecil when this criticism was raised originally by Attorney-General Smith. The Commission was an extraordinary body detailed to gain the facts concerning

[1]Memo by Chamberlain, 14 Jul 16, Cabinet minutes 11 Jul 16, CAB/42/16/5.

[2]Barker, Neglected War, p. 462; Busch, p. 129.

the campaign; they were not a court, and no judges or lawyers were members, so they proceeded in the most direct manner available. They were given special powers in order for them to do so. Other than those they were never under any directions to act in any particular way as they carried out their investigation.

Next, the Commission was criticised for not calling any witnesses from the Indian Quartermaster-General's section, nor for visiting India. Barker observes: 'Such a blatant omission lends force to the criticism that the members of the Commission sitting on soft seats in London never grasped the significance of some of the issues they were supposed to be investigating.'[1] Would questioning the Quartermaster-General have produced any significant difference in the findings? The Commissioners may have gained a more complete understanding of the difficulties under which they operated, but this begs the question. The ultimate problem was not that the supply section could not deliver an adequate amount of shipping and materials of war, but that what they did send had no effect on the decision-making process. The fault lay in Nixon, who refused to take his logistics into account when planning his campaign. The fighting in Mesopotamia was not so difficult because the Quartermaster Corps was derelict in its duty, but because Nixon would not use his supplies wisely or wait for sufficient supplies to arrive. The supply line from India to the front could have been improved and disaster averted had Nixon been wise enough to base his plans on his force's abilities rather than on his own desires. Had the Commissioners visited India, the outcome would surely have been identical:

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[1]Barker, Neglected War, p. 462.

a better knowledge of the system, a system which cried out for improvement, but not a major change in the results of the Report. Although the system was faulty, it was not the ultimate problem, nor was its reform the ultimate solution. Both problem and solution lay in command.

Barker also criticises the Commission's findings concerning the supply of drafts to the front. The Report blamed India for not doing enough to keep the number of men in the Army as high as possible. Barker comments that 'pre-war policy imposed by Whitehall was not considered--it was sufficient that the Indian Government had not shown prevision.'[1] Rumbold also points out the Report's lack of blame accruing to the War Office for not supplying any replacements.[2] These comments are true, of course; the Nicholson Commission cut the Indian Army budget to the bone at the worst possible time. This only shows that the Commission ignored Whitehall's responsibility on this point, not that the criticism of India's recruiting policy was in error. Since India's policies were determined almost exclusively by Hardinge and Duff, then the same personnel problem arises in the command structure.

Barker's major criticism deals with the members of the Commission, that its structure showed a 'strong political bias.'[3] If he refers to their political affiliations, then a look at the representation denies such a bias: two Lords, two Liberals, one Labour and one Unionist from the Parliamentary ranks. If he refers to the fact that six of the eight members were in the political sphere, that is only natural as the

[1]Barker, Neglected War, p. 460.

[2]Rumbold, p. 80.

[3]Barker, Neglected War, p. 461.

investigation was begun by Parliament and the results were destined for that body. The Members of the House of Commons themselves insisted upon the addition of military and naval representatives; the Government proposal had included neither. Barker goes on to cite the lack of expertise on the Commission, yet this too is questionable. As Lord Hugh Cecil said, 'It was certainly the view taken by the Commission that it was a Commission to enquire into what may be called, broadly, a question of administrative efficiency. . . . they nominated distinguished administrators, like Lord George Hamilton, Members of Parliament, and persons familiar with military and naval administration.'[1] Lord George Hamilton had been Secretary of State for India; the Earl of Donoughmore had been Undersecretary of State for War; General Neville Lyttelton had been Chief of the Imperial General Staff; surely these men had had broad experience in administration. Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge had presided at the North Sea Enquiry Commission, so he had experience to draw on to advise on procedure. None of them had intimate experience with the Indian Army, it is true. Here, perhaps an Indian veteran may have been a better selection than Lyttelton. Still, would that have radically altered the findings? By examining so many witnesses from so many areas and strata of Indian service, was not the Commission adequately advised on any necessary points? After all, the Government's original proposal, excluding military and naval personnel, used that same theory, that expert knowledge would be available through the witnesses. In order to have a Commission adequately representing all aspects of the

[1] Hansard, vol. XCV, 12 Jul 17, pp. 2180-81.

investigation so many members would have been necessary that the group would have been unwieldy.

Assuming, then, that the Commission did the best job it could have done, one must question whether it should have been formed at all, and what were its after-effects? 'The Mesopotamia Commission was, perhaps, inevitable, for Britain had a habit of official enquiries into military disasters dating, in modern times, from the Crimean War.'[1] Taking this view by Busch, the Commission was a matter of tradition, if not policy. Other disasters such as Crimea and the Boer War earned Commissions of Enquiry, and rightly so. If gross negligence causes avoidable fiascos, then such negligence should be investigated and put right, and those culpable dealt with. By having the civilians and military foist off the blame upon each other in these two instances, no punishment ensued. Were they then worthwhile? Assuming they brought about reform to overcome future negligence, yes, they were. The question remains, however: was justice done? Or was justice even involved?

When Asquith offered Parliament the Special Commissions Act, A. J. P. Taylor theorises that it was no more than a 'red herring' to gain support for him in the House.[2] True, his political fortunes were not running high at the time, but it is doubtful that, even had he been in a strong position, he could have avoided taking action. Pressure throughout the House was such that his attempts to avoid or postpone an investigation met with no success. Even at the best of times, the only feasible reason not to launch an enquiry would be the excuse of national

[1] Busch, p. 127.

[2] Taylor, p. 58.

interest in time of war; this did not appease the House when he did use it, and it is open to question whether it would have been any more effective had Asquith's position been more tenable politically.

Support for the Special Commissions Act spread across party lines, so general was the desire for investigation. Surely this was a desire for information to determine exactly what brought about the breakdown in Mesopotamia, with the purpose of making right those failings. There seemed to be no vindictiveness during the debates on the Special Commissions Act, nor in the proceedings during the investigation. Not until the Report was published and certain persons, as well as the overall system, were named as responsible for the disaster did anyone call for retribution along with reform. Hardinge, Duff, and Nixon received the weightiest share of blame, as well they should. Indeed, it has been one intent of this paper to show that they were even more guilty than the Report indicated. Since these men were directly responsible for the unnecessary suffering and death in the campaign, should they have been punished, or excused? One may argue that to punish them would change nothing, that the agonies of the fighting in Mesopotamia would not now be relieved for those who had suffered through the opening eighteen months of the campaign. This may be true, but if such an argument is to be used, why have any judicial system of tradition at all? Why have a legal or penal system if not to administer justice?

This leads to the major issue of the Commission's effect. If any retribution was to be given, who was to order it? Certainly not the Commission; it had no judicial or executive power. Once its Report was submitted, its function had passed. Should it have been done by a

special tribunal? None could agree upon one to deal with soldiers and civilians alike. The only feasible answer was to have action taken by either the House of Commons or the Government. The actions of the Government upon receiving the Report show how ill-prepared they were for such a document. The Government directed Lord Curzon, Lord Privy Seal, to head a committee to consider disciplinary action against those named by the Commission. The committee consisted of Curzon, Lord Derby, Austen Chamberlain (although he was named in the Report, he had not yet resigned), and George Nicholl Barnes, Minister without portfolio in the War Cabinet. They decided to take no action against Hardinge, assuming he had acted upon bad military advice. Duff had suffered sufficiently by losing his position as Commander-in-Chief, with the resultant loss of prestige and money. He and Babtie 'should be called upon to retire under the provisions of Article 527 of the "Royal Warrant for the Pay, Appointment, Promotion and Non-Effective Pay of the Army". Lord Derby dissented from this proposal with regard to Surgeon-General Babtie.' Further, Hathaway should be called upon to resign his commission. Retirement, accordinge to the Royal Warrant, entitled the person to retirement pay, whereas resignation of one's commission meant losing the pension. MacNeese received a reprimand. Nixon, after being named most responsible by the Report, did not receive official censure from this committee.[1] These, however, were no more than recommendations to the Army Council; they were not definite actions to be taken.

When the Army Council decided that they could take no action owing to the indemnity clause, the Government again had the responsibility

[1]Notes from a meeting held 18 Jun 17 at the Privy Council, IO/EUR. MSS./F112.163.

to act, and again they evaded it. They instead put forward the tribunal suggestion, thereby asking the House of Commons to decide what should be done. After three days of debate, they decided nothing, and in the end accepted the Government's proposal to excuse the civilians and let the Army Council deal with the soldiers, all but one of whom were exonerated. Thus, by passing the issue around, no one had to take the final decision. In the end, therefore, the Mesopotamia Commission was a waste of time. Eight men spent several months working their hardest to produce an accurate record of events, doing so at Government request, and doing as good a job as could be expected, and absolutely nothing came of it. As stated before, the Indian reforms were in the offing anyway, and the medical service in Mesopotamia improved with the information supplied by the Vincent-Bingley Report and the organisation of War Office control. The Commission performed neither of the two functions it should have: it emphasised the need for reform, but it did not bring it about; and it named those guilty of negligence that was virtually criminal, but it could not induce anyone to act against them. If the Commission was appointed to find a scapegoat, the Government showed that they did not want one. If it was formed to lead to reform, it was too late to do so since the reforms were already being planned.

The ultimate question remains: was justice done? Although the Mesopotamia Commission was formed to investigate for reform, its Report brought about the question of justice. The Government tried to avoid taking action by attacking the Commission in the House of Commons, but theirs was the ultimate responsibility. Perhaps the best description

of the Government's position was put forward by the Manchester Guardian:

> But, after all, does the public servant have the right to have the benefit of all legal rules of evidence, like the burglar? We are not sure. The burglar, if he is convicted, loses his civil rights; not so the politician or the public servant who is censured for incompetence or bad judgement. The one is innocent until he is convicted; the other has to be above suspicion. In the one case the issue is one of guilt in the eye of the law; in the other it is one of political fitness or unfitness. The true analogy is not with the criminal, but with the employee, who often loses his position on evidence that would be insufficient to convict a man on a criminal charge. All that can be reasonably expected of an employer who has grounds for suspicion is that he should act without haste and without prejudice; he need not observe all the legal rules of evidence. We confess that for the Government, after appointing a Commission, to appoint a Judicial Court of Enquiry strikes one as an evasion of its Executive responsibility.[1]

The Government, of course, did none of this, but perhaps they saw the more subtle method of punishment that would not reflect on them, so long as they avoided direct action. Perhaps they decided to act on the idea that the publication of the Report 'would--such as in the case of the ex-Viceroy--in itself be a punishment to those whose conduct had been thus exposed, and that it would be very damaging to their reputations and future careers.'[2] The Government may well have let the press and the public perform their own punishments of the accused, while they did not dirty their hands and could, as Lloyd George requested at the height of the debate, get on with the war.

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[1] Manchester Guardian, 13 Jul 7, p. 4.

[2] Notes from a meeting held 18 Jun 17 at the Privy Council, IO/EUR. MSS./F112.163.

# APPENDIX

An Act to constitute Special Commissions to inquire into the origin, inception, and conduct of Operations of War in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, and into the origin, inception, and conduct of Operations of War in Mesopotamia. [17th August 1916.]

Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:-

1.--(1) The following persons, namely,
The Right Honourable the Earl of Cromer, G.C.B., O.M., G.C.M.G., K.C.S.I., C.I.E.,
The Right Honourable Andrew Fisher,
The Honourable Sir Thomas Mackenzie, K.C.M.G.,
Sir Frederick Cawley, Baronet, Member of Parliament,
James Avon Clyde, Esquire, King's Counsel, Member of Parliament,
Captain Stephen Lucius Gwynn, Member of Parliament,
Walter Francis Roch, Esquire, Member of Parliament,
Admiral of the Fleet Sir William Henry May, G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,
Field-Marshall Lord Nicholson, G.C.B., and
The Right Honourable Sir William Pickford, Knight, one of the Lords Justices of Appeal,
are hereby appointed Commissioners for the purpose of inquiring into the origin, inception, and conduct of operations of war in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, including the supply of drafts, reinforcements, ammunition and equipment to the troops and fleet, the provision for the sick and wounded and the responsibility of those departments of Government whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of the forces employed in that theatre of war.

(2) The following persons, namely,
The Right Honourable Lord George Francis Hamilton, G.C.S.I.,
The Right Honourable the Earl of Donoughmore,
Lord Hugh Cecil, Member of Parliament,
Sir Archibald Williamson, Baronet, Member of Parliament,
John Hodge, Esquire, Member of Parliament,
Commander Josiah C. Wedgwood, Member of Parliament,
Admiral Sir Cyprian Arthur George Bridge, G.C.B., and
General the Right Honourable Sir Neville Gerald Lyttelton, G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,
are hereby appointed Commissioners for the purpose of inquiring into the origin, inception, and conduct of operations of war in Mesopotamia, including the supply of drafts, reinforcements, ammunition and equipment to the troops and fleet, the provision for the sick and wounded and the responsibility of those departments of Government whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of the forces employed in that theatre of war.

2.--(1) The Commissioners appointed under this Act shall have all powers, rights and privileges as are vested in the High Court or in any judge thereof, on the occasion of any action, in respect of the following matters:-

(a) The enforcing: of attendance of witnesses and examining them on oath, affirmation, or otherwise, and the issue of a commission or a request to examine witnesses abroad; and

(b) The compelling the production of documents; and

(c) The punishing persons guilty of contempt;

and a summons signed by one or more of the Commissioners may be substituted for and shall be equivalent to any formal process capable of being issued in any action for enforcing the attendance of witnesses and compelling the production of documents.

(2)A warrant of committal to prison issued for the purpose of enforcing the powers conferred by this Section shall be signed by one or more of the Commissioners, and shall specify the prison to which the offender is to be committed, but shall not authorise the imprisonment of an offender for a period exceeding three months.

(3) The Commissioners may authorise the representation before them of any person appearing to them to be interested by counsel, or solicitor, or otherwise, if they consider that any injustice would ensue if that person were not so represented.

(4) The Commissioners may act notwithstanding any vacancy in their number and three shall be a quorum, but the Commissioners may delegate to two or more of their number their powers of holding sittings for the purpose of making inquiries and taking evidence abroad, and any powers in relation thereto.

3.--(1) The Commissioners shall, having regard to the interests of the public and to naval, military and diplomatic considerations, allow or refuse to allow the public or any portion of the public to be present during any proceedings of the Commissioners: Provided that a full and complete record in shorthand shall be kept of all the evidence taken whether in public or in private.

(2) If any person who is present at any proceedings of the Commissioners at which the public or any portion thereof are not allowed to be present discloses, without the authority of the Commissioners, or without proper authority given on behalf of His Majesty, either directly or indirectly, anything that has taken place at those proceedings, he shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and the Official Secrets Act, 1911, shall apply as it applies to a misdemeanor under Section two of that Act.

4.--(1) A person examined as a witness by the Commissioners shall not be excluded from producing any document or giving any information on the ground that such document or information is secret or confidential, or is entitled to be withheld under Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act, 1911, or from answering any question put to him, or from producing any document, on the ground that the answer thereto or production thereof may criminate or tend to criminate him, but any answer so given shall not be evidence against that person in any criminal proceeding (including a proceeding by court-martial) at any time thereafter instituted against him, and any document so produced shall not be evidence against

him in any such proceeding unless the production of that document could be enforced in those proceedings or evidence of that document could be otherwise obtained in any such proceedings.
(2) Nothing in this Section shall apply to the case of proceedings for having given false evidence before the Commissioners, or of having procured, or attempted or conspired to procure, the giving of such evidence.
5.--The Commissioners may hold sittings outside the United Kingdom, and for the purpose of any such sittings in India, or of anything required to be done in India by or on behalf of the Commissioners, this Act shall have effect as if a High Court of Chief Court in British India were substituted for the High Court.
6.--Any Report of the Commissioners, and any Minority Report, shall be laid as soon as may be before both Houses of Parliament, and the Commissioners may, if they think fit, make interim Reports; provided always that the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Mesopotamian campaign shall proceed with all possible expedition to inquire with regard to the provision for the sick and wounded, and shall report the result of their inquiries on this matter as soon as they are completed.
7.--This Act may be cited as the Special Commissions (Dardanelles and Mesopotamia) Act, 1916.

Taken from The Public General Acts passed in the sixth and seventh years of the reign of His Majesty King George the Fifth, Chapter 34, pp. 105-108.

## NOTE ON SOURCES

The majority of the research done for this thesis took place in the Public Record Office and the India Office Library. The Townshend papers were made available to me through the courtesy of Colonel A. J. Barker, who has donated them to the Liddell Hart Archives at King's College. Colonel Barker states that the diary Townshend kept throughout his service life has been lost since his death in 1924. There is no record of private collections for either Sir Beauchamp Duff or Sir John Nixon, according to Chris Cook, Sources in British Political History, vol. 2 (London, 1975). The papers of all the major figures mentioned in the text, in British service, have been consulted if available.

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